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CUTTING FOR PARTNERS

BY

JOHN CORDY JEAFFRESON

AUTHOR OF

‘LIVE IT DOWN,’ ‘NOT DEAD YET,’ ‘LOTTIE DARLING,’
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CUTTING FOR PARTNERS.

CHAPTER I.

DR. CHALLONER'S SONS.

LEMUEL CHALLONER, M.D., President of the College of Physicians of London, had been a widower for three years and two months, when he died in his fifty-second year at his house in Mayfair. Dying prematurely in 1790, the scholarly physician left only two children, and twenty-five thousand pounds, to be divided equally between them. These children were sons,—Lemuel, who at the time of his father's death had crowned a brilliant career at Cambridge by winning a Trinity fellowship, and Geoffrey, who at the same time was a little boy *ætat.* 10, at a Blackheath boarding-school. To

account for the great difference of twelve years between the ages of Dr. Challoner's two surviving children, it may be remarked that the physician had failed to preserve the majority of his own offspring from early death.

Fate had not approached the physician without warning. Aware for thirteen months of the nature of his disease, Dr. Challoner had anticipated its certain event by arranging his affairs with delicate care for the feelings of his friends, and for the interests and sensibilities of the two individuals who would suffer the most from his death. Continuing to visit his patients, so long as he could be useful to them, he bore a calm and even cheerful face to the world, whilst he watched the gradual failure of his powers with scientific curiosity. Knowing that he should not be alive to welcome the little fellow on his return from Blackheath, he sent Geoffrey off to school, without letting the child suspect that his father was out of health. Lemuel had enjoyed his elevation to a Trinity fellowship for a fortnight before he received the pathetic letter which summoned him from Cambridge to his father's bed-side.

‘I have arranged my affairs,’ Dr. Challoner said to his elder son, when the latter had hastened to Mayfair from the university, ‘so that they may cause the least possible trouble to my survivors. I have appointed you to be one of my executors, and one of the trustees of Geoffrey’s half of my modest estate. I wish it had seemed good to the Almighty to prolong my life, so that I could have accomplished my hope of leaving each of my boys a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. But you must take the will for the deed, and be content with a clear twelve thousand pounds. It will be enough to start you well in your professions.’

‘More than enough, father. The smaller sum will do as well as the larger.’

‘You must be thoughtful for Geoffrey.’

‘I am not likely to be less than dutiful, sir, to everyone who is dear to you!’ returned the young Fellow of Trinity, who at moments of strong emotion was apt to revert to a practice of his boyhood, and to address his father with the old-fashioned ‘sir.’

‘Good boy!’ said the father, smiling tenderly as he pressed Lemuel’s hand. ‘I like that “sir”;

it reminds me of the time when you were at Eton. But,' he continued, after pausing to gather energy, 'you must be *very* good to little Geoff. For more than three years I have done my best to be mother as well as father to him. And now, Lem, you must take him in hand, and be everything to him,—brother, mother, father, friend. He may cause you trouble ; for, though he is an affectionate, gentle, brave little fellow, he has a vein of the Challoner bad temper, as well as a richer vein of the Challoner kindness. And you, Lem, you are quick-tempered at times. Yes, yes, you saucy fellow, I know what you are thinking ! Of course, the heat of your blood came to you from me. Heaven knows you didn't get it from your dear mother ! Should little Geoff ever worry you and be a bit mutinous, be patient with him, especially patient as he passes from boyhood to manhood. You will always be the older and stronger.'

'I will remember, sir, I will remember,' was all that Lemuel could trust himself to say for the moment. A minute later he inquired, in a steadier voice, 'Sha'n't I send for him, sir ? You would like to see him again ; and we can

fetch him from Blackheath in a few hours.'

'I should like to see him again ; but I should not like him to see me in this state. He is a nervous and delicate child, though so brave ; and the pain of seeing me might be too acute and enduring. He may not attend my funeral, and my death had better be kept from his knowledge till the funeral is over. Don't you think that will be best ?'

'Yes, sir,—I agree with you.'

'Though he is delicate and highly nervous,' resumed the physician, after another and longer break in the conversation, 'and will never be such a big fellow as you are, he bids fair to escape from the particular constitutional weakness that deprived me of so many children. If proper care be taken, he may live to be a strong man. His intellect may not be forced. You cannot do better than send him to Henslowe's school till he is fourteen ; for Dr. Henslowe has the most important qualities of a good school-master, he is a sufficient scholar, and he is an intelligent, sympathetic, just man. Moreover, he is under great obligations to me, and will be no less grateful to me when I am gone than he

has been ever since I made his school successful.'

'And now, dear father, you have talked enough, at least for the present. You see, sir, the tables have turned, and I have become your doctor.'

'A few words more,—for I may not again be strong enough to talk,—Geoff must be reared tenderly till he is fourteen. Then he must rough it with other lads. If he holds to his present fancy of being a sailor, put him into the navy. Encourage the fancy, without forcing it. The sea will give him the best chance of becoming a strong man. Yes, I have talked enough. Thank God, I have nothing more to say. I will sleep a little.'

A quite young man's regard for his much younger brother is seldom deficient in tenderness and sympathy. Lemuel only resembled many another big brother in covering his little Geoff with benignant patronage. But the solemn and pathetic circumstances under which the child was committed to the charge of the youngest Fellow of Trinity imparted for some years an almost sacred devotion to Lemuel Challoner's care for his brother and ward.

So long as Geoffrey remained at the Blackheath school, the tall and stalwart Lemuel was often seen in the playground of Dr. Henslowe's pupils, who soon learned to honour Challoner's big brother for his height, strength, and athletic address, his affable manners, and his consummate mastery of all the games and sports that are especially interesting to the young gentlemen of a superfine preparatory boarding-school.

In the interval between his father's death and his first cruise, Geoffrey had his 'home' (or rather his 'homes') at his brother's Cambridge rooms and his brother's London chambers, and passed his holidays either at the university, where he lived on easy terms with the *élite* of Trinity, or at the Inner Temple, where his big brother was soon spoken of as a young barrister, who would make a quick march to the fore in Westminster Hall. At Cambridge, big Lemuel took little Geoffrey daily on the river; in London, besides being taken on the Thames, Geoffrey was introduced by his magnificent brother to every place of amusement to which a lad of his tender age could be taken with propriety. When small Geoffrey entered the

navy, it was big Lemuel who brought him to his first ship and to the presence of his first captain at Plymouth. Four years later, when the lad returned to England from his first cruise, Lemuel was waiting at Portsmouth to grasp his hand and welcome him ashore.

This reunion of the brothers was joyful, for each could congratulate the other on events that had occurred during their separation. A foot taller than he was on joining his ship, Geoffrey had come back with a ruddy-brown face, dark down on his lip, and vigour in every muscle of his body. Overflowing with enthusiasm for 'the service,' he had won the personal regard of his captain (Captain Fullalove, in later time Rear-Admiral Sir Andrew Fullalove, K.C.B.), and could point to an honourable scar on his right forearm. Already a man of mark in Westminster Hall and on circuit, Lemuel had taken chambers on a ground-floor of his inn, and strengthened his hold on the attorneys east of Temple Bar by marrying Dorothy Fisher, daughter of Sir Frederick Fisher, Knt., merchant of Mark Lane, and whilom Lord Mayor of the City of London,—a

rather attractive but essentially commonplace young woman, whose appearance was chiefly commendable for the animation of her round face and merry brown eyes, and the silky fineness and profusion of her dark brown tresses.

To Lemuel Challoner this scarcely beautiful Dorothy, with her round face, short neck, and trim figure, was the loveliest of English woman-kind; and, out of generous sympathy with his idolized brother, Geoffrey would have taken the same extravagant view of her title to masculine homage, even if she had welcomed him less cordially to her house in Great James Street, Bedford Row,—from which sufficiently ample dwelling the Lemuel Challoners migrated three years later to one of the grandest houses of Queen's Square, Bloomsbury. Partly because she wished to gratify her husband, of whom she was immensely proud, and partly because the young sailor's worshipful bearing to his brother's enchantress tickled her self-complacence, Dorothy Challoner made much of her brother-in-law, who deemed himself a superlatively fortunate fellow in being allowed to attend so charming a woman to theatres and the Vauxhall Gardens,

to civic balls and to routs in 'The Law Quarter,' little imagining how in course of time he would come to regard her as the most insincere and most cruel of women.

In their affectionate intercourse, from the season of their father's death to the doleful time when they passed almost in the twinkling of an eye from love to enmity, it was Geoffrey's delight to admire a brother whom he regarded as immeasurably superior to himself in every respect, and it was Lemuel's pleasure to be idolized by a brother who in the senior's opinion took only a reasonable view of their respective merits. Delighting in Geoffrey's admiration, when he was only a little fellow who needed beneficent protection, Lemuel was even more delighted by Geoffrey's idolatry, when the latter had grown to manhood. On the other hand, time quickened the intensity of the young sailor's admiration for his marvellous brother. It is needless to say that, whilst Lemuel thought somewhat too well of himself, the idolater thought very much too highly of his idol. When Geoffrey had completed his

twenty-seventh year, his inferiority to Mr. Lemuel Challoner of the common-law bar was less manifest to fine and impartial judges of the two men, than it was to the brothers themselves.

Lemuel Challoner, whose *mots* flash so brightly in books of legal *ana*, and whose finer wit appears to even greater advantage in the comedies of his nameless pen, was unquestionably more amusing, and in every mental respect far stronger than the modest and unobtrusive Geoffrey; but, in all the forces and virtues that constitute true nobility of nature, the sometimes silent and always sincere sailor was greatly superior to the loquacious and brilliant lawyer. Whilst Lieutenant Challoner, R.N., no less in his lightest than in his severest moods, was considerate for the feelings of his neighbours, and precisely veracious, Mr. Challoner of the common-law bar was ever quick to sacrifice his friend to a jest, or the truth to a specious fallacy, if the sacrifice promised to win him a round of applause or a controversial victory. As a mere acquaintance, the elder was distinctly better company than the younger brother. But, for a

daily and life-long companion, who would not prefer a plain man of average intelligence and sterling goodness to a wit, incessantly set on shining?

In respect to the unfavourable opinion, which he held of Dorothy Challoner from the commencement of his quarrel with his brother, Geoffrey did his sister-in-law great injustice. Lemuel Challoner was not more wrong in thinking (as he did to his dying day) that the quarrel arose wholly out of Antoinette's perversity, discontent, and untruthfulness, than Geoffrey Challoner was wrong in attributing the discord to Dorothy's malice and cruelty. Possibly the brothers would never have quarrelled had the two ladies never been born. But, whilst the essentially commonplace Dorothy was not deficient in the commonplace virtue of kindness, the finer-natured Antoinette was wholly incapable of saying or doing anything with the deliberate intention of setting her husband and his big brother by the ears. Though they were each in some degree accountable for the rupture, the two wives were far less guilty in the affair than their husbands; and, if either of the two

women refrained from exercising her influence to bring about a settlement of the quarrel, she refrained only from the fear of making matters worse by untimely meddling.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO SISTERS-IN-LAW.

FROM its inception in the Plymouth Assembly Rooms to its celebration by wedding-bells, the attachment of Geoffrey Challoner to Antoinette Endsleigh was a rather quick affair. On Geoffrey's side, at least, the passion was love at first sight. The engagement was announced within six weeks of the passion's birth, and the announcement was followed in another six weeks by the wedding. It came about in this manner. In these poor days, when dancing is not honoured as it ought to be, the navy can still dance the army out of breath, and go on smiling for another hour. Seventy years since, the officers of the British Navy were the best and most enthusiastic dancers in the whole world. It was, therefore, in accordance with naval

usage that, on the evening of the day following their arrival in Plymouth harbour, Geoffrey Challoner and divers other officers of H.M.S. *Atropos* appeared at the ball in the Plymouth Assembly Rooms.

Coming early to the assembly-rooms, Lieutenant Challoner, wearing his full-dress uniform, in accordance with the fashion of the period, arrived in time to see the master of the ceremonies introduce a young cavalry officer to a charming girl for the first quadrille, and to watch the same young gentlewoman throughout the dance, as she moved to and fro with her graceful figure and happy face. As he had no partner for this first dance, Lieutenant Challoner was well pleased to stand in a corner and play the modest part of a spectator; and in that character he watched the young lady from the beginning to the end of the quadrille, and then saw the fortunate cavalry officer restore his partner to the tall, thin, handsome old chaperon, from whose care he had taken her.

‘You think her rather good-looking?’ inquired a familiar voice close behind the admiring Geoffrey.

‘I think her *lovely!*’ returned Lieutenant Challoner, with a significant note in his bell-like voice, and an even more significant brightness in his big eyes, that caused Captain Fullalove to smile cheerily.

‘I should think so, if I were as young as you,—and I *do* think so, though, unfortunately, I have entered my forty-eighth year. There,—does that satisfy you?’

‘In my whole life,’ said Lieutenant Challoner, in a low voice, but with an earnestness that was comical, ‘I never saw, never imagined so elegant and stately a girl!’

‘Then come round with me to the other side of the room, and I will introduce you to her,’ said the handsome captain of H.M.S. *Atropos* to his favourite lieutenant.

‘What, sir,—do you know her?’

‘Intimately,—and, what is better, I think she rather likes me. There, there, don’t be jealous! I have a wife in London town, and in honour I could not even flirt with Antoinette Endsleigh, my old friend Endsleigh’s daughter. She is the late Colonel Endsleigh’s daughter, and I am her guardian. The tall, thin, handsome gentle-

woman, under whose wing my ward is sitting, is my dear old friend Miss Rebecca Endsleigh. Fancy finding them here, when they ought to be at Bath! Yes, my ward is a lovely creature, —no taller than when I last saw her, but changed from a too slight slip of a thing into a rare beauty. The Endsleighs are great people in this west country, as you probably know. Antoinette's grandfather was Sir Joshua Endsleigh, sixth baronet of Scoone's Court, who descended from one (I forget which) of the Lords Endsleigh of Shalford. The Scoone's Court family have lost a goodish bit of their former estate; but the Shalford people, with their barony from Henry the Seventh and their earldom of William the Third's creation, are a mighty house. So my Antoinette has enough blue blood in her veins. I wish the dear child had more of "the siller." She has a little fortune, and will get something more from her aunt; but she is no heiress. I may as well tell you that before you lose your heart to her.'

'You speak too late, sir,' rejoined Geoffrey Challoner. 'I lost it full half-an-hour ago.'

'Then, come this way,' said Captain Fulla-

love, as he began to thread his way through the rapidly-growing assembly to the rout-seat, on which the aunt and niece were sitting.

In another minute Geoffrey Challoner had a new view of his enchantress, as she sprang from her seat with a cry of delight on her lips and a blush of joyful surprise in her face.

‘Dear guardian, this is a surprise! Where did you spring from? The *Atropos* isn’t at Plymouth?’ ejaculated the young woman, extending both hands to her father’s friend.

‘’Tis clear you haven’t read the morning’s paper with due care. But we are here to dance. Have you a partner for “The Lancers”?’

‘No,—fortunately no. I shall so enjoy dancing with you.’

‘Nonsense, Netta;—you are laughing at my gouty feet! Here is your partner, child;—my particular friend, Lieutenant Challoner—Miss Antoinette Endsleigh.’

For a moment Antoinette looked as though she wished her guardian’s particular friend were on board his own particular ship; but the look was followed by a complaisant smile, and the two young people went off for the dance,

leaving Captain Fullalove to gossip with Aunt Rebecca, who soon learned from the captain a good deal about Lieutenant Challoner, and nothing to the young man's discredit. A son of the well-descended court-physician, who died some twenty years since, and younger brother of the well-known barrister, Lieutenant Challoner, was a gentleman by birth, who carried on his person three honourable marks of his gallantry in action. The earliest of the scars was a mere scratch from a splinter. But the shot that struck him at Copenhagen would have cost him his right arm, and possibly his life, had it hit him a barley-corn higher or lower. The wound he received at the glorious battle that crowned the great Nelson's career was an even more serious affair. The young man, who was in every respect an exemplary officer, could not fail to rise to eminence in the service. A man of inexpensive tastes, though free-handed enough with his money in matters touching his dignity, he possessed a small patrimony that yielded him something over six hundred a-year. If Antoinette, with her three hundred a-year in hand, and possibly as much more to come to

her by-and-by from a certain good aunt, should find her present partner irresistibly charming, Captain Fullalove was of opinion that Miss Rebecca Endsleigh would have no reason to regret having brought her niece to the Plymouth Assembly Rooms. As Captain Fullalove, speaking in the lowest of confidential voices, said all this, and a good deal more, in Geoffrey Challoner's behalf to Miss Rebecca Endsleigh, whilst 'The Lancers' was being danced, it is not wonderful that the elderly lady scrutinized this young lieutenant with some curiosity when he had reappeared with Antoinette on his arm.

Miss Rebecca Endsleigh was of opinion that Lieutenant Challoner was scarcely tall enough for Antoinette, and even looked 'a mere shrimp of a man' by the side of his tall and elegant captain. But it did not escape the observant lady that the lieutenant had a peculiarly pleasant voice and a pair of delightfully winning eyes. At the same time, the younger Miss Endsleigh's animated face afforded her chaperon conclusive indications that she was favourably impressed by her new acquaintance. It told in Geoffrey Challoner's favour, that later in the

ball, when he was waltzing with Miss Antoinette Endsleigh, she discovered with simple delight that *his* step was exactly *her* step; and as their eyes met, when with characteristic frankness she told him what she thought of *his* step, it cannot be questioned that the sensitive and sympathetic girl found something to like in the two best features of the lieutenant's honest face.

If Geoffrey was smitten at first sight, Miss Antoinette Endsleigh was not slow in responding to his good opinion. To tell the truth, when she retired to rest after the eventful ball, and was awaiting the sleep that soon closed her eyelids, Antoinette mused wonderingly on words he had spoken, and on looks he had given her, and was all the happier for feeling that he liked her as much as a young man in his right mind could like a girl on so brief an acquaintance. It was thus that Geoffrey and Antoinette made their first quick steps to the estate of life, that in their case proved no 'failure.'

As Geoffrey, on all previous occasions of returning from sea, had come at the earliest opportunity straight to her house, Dorothy Challoner had reason to be astonished at the

letter, dated from Plymouth, in which he announced that he could not say exactly when he should appear in Queen's Square, as he had fallen in with certain very agreeable people, who were 'some of Captain Fullalove's oldest friends.' Mrs. Challoner was of opinion that Geoffrey should have been more communicative about these very agreeable people. He might at least have mentioned their names.

'I wonder whether they are all *so old*,' said Mrs. Challoner suspiciously, as she nodded her head in a way that caused her husband lively amusement.

Ten days later, the lady's suspicion was quickened almost to certainty by the letter, which informed her that Lieutenant Challoner was at Bath, where Captain Fullalove would stay for a few weeks, drinking the waters which had been recommended for his gout. The writer of the epistle was the more hopeful for the captain's case, as he would, whilst taking the waters, see more of the agreeable people mentioned in a previous letter, who had returned from Plymouth to their usual abode in a picturesque suburb of Somerset's fashionable city.

As he could not leave the invalid till the latter had taken the turn to health, and was moreover well-pleased with his quarters at the York House Hotel, he should probably remain at Bath for three or four weeks.

‘I told you that Geoffrey had fallen in love,’ ejaculated Dorothy Challoner, when she had read the letter to her husband.

‘You did,’ replied the barrister, looking as he spoke from his breakfast-plate to the clock on the mantelpiece, ‘but I fail to see the evidence.’

‘Don’t talk in that way about evidence, Lemuel; you are not in court. Considering *all* things, Geoffrey ought to be more communicative to *us*.’

‘He may have nothing to communicate. If there’s any love-making, it’s just as likely to be between Captain Fullalove and one of his agreeable friends. Possibly the captain has gone to Bath to get married. If so, Geoffrey is right to be silent about his friend’s business.’

‘You *don’t* know that Captain Fullalove has a wife in London? ’Tis years since he married Lady Diana Candlewick, daughter of the late and sister of the present Earl of Tarpaulin in

the peerage of Ireland. The earl's seat is Bogfenny Castle, co. Limerick. If you think I am wrong, look up Tarpaulin in the peerage.'

For the present it was enough for Lemuel to look up the time. Glancing again at the clock, the busy man sprang to his feet and went off to chambers.

Mrs. Challoner's hour of triumph over her husband came to Queen's Square together with the letter, which announced in Geoffrey's clear handwriting that he 'was engaged to Miss Antoinette Endsleigh, only surviving child of the late Lieutenant-colonel Peregrine Endsleigh of the 4th Lancers,—a gentlewoman whom the writer of course regarded as everything that was amiable and charming.'

From the outset of their familiar intercourse, Dorothy and Antoinette were uncongenial sisters-in-law,—and none the less so for their several conscientious efforts to like one another. Though she was utterly incapable of intending to sow discord in the family circle which she was about to enter, Antoinette was so unfortunate as to conceive a slight distaste for Dorothy before setting eyes upon her. In his anxiety

that Antoinette should regard his brother and his brother's wife no less cordially than he regarded them, Geoffrey committed the mistake of over-praising them to his future wife. Informing her that Lemuel was one of the handsomest men in London, and the most brilliant orator of the common-law bar, Geoffrey assured her that he was in every respect inferior to his marvellous brother; and the young lieutenant of His Majesty's navy spoke no less hyperbolically of Dorothy's moral graces. Patient of the praises he lavished on the magnificent Lemuel, Antoinette in her heart admired her lover's generous enthusiasm for his elder brother; but when Geoffrey for the third time, during the same morning's ramble through the picturesque lanes of Charlcombe, declared his sister-in-law 'the very best woman on the earth's surface,' the young lady, staying her steps and blushing as she rose in mutiny, remarked,

'Have you not a qualifying clause to add to that statement? *You, sir, should not speak quite so highly of Mrs. Challoner to me.*'

Geoffrey laughed lightly as he replied, with some excitement,

‘To me, Netta, you of course are incomparably better than any other woman in the whole world! That was understood.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ returned Miss Antoinette Endsleigh, as she gave her idolater a playful little courtesy before she made the next step onwards. But Geoffrey regretted the indiscretion which had provoked the piquant protest; and he resolved to be more temperate in his talk about Dorothy’s excellences.

Though she had only done what was most agreeable to her own feelings, in teaching Geoffrey to regard her house as his home, Dorothy Challoner saw much to admire in her sisterly demeanour to the young sailor, and reflected with virtuous self-complacence on the debt of gratitude he owed her for treating him so hospitably—first, in Great James Street and then in Queen’s Square, Bloomsbury. It is in the way of common-place people to think well of themselves for being amiably selfish. Having derived so much contentment from her ‘goodness’ to Geoffrey, Mrs. Challoner was in the humour to be no less good to the young lady whom he was about to take out of Somerset for

better and for worse. In truth, Lemuel Challoner's no longer youthful wife anticipated a renewal of former pleasure in patronizing the young lady from Somerset,—in taking her to the Goldsmiths' balls and to the receptions at the Mansion House, and introducing her to society and the sights of London. As motives of delicacy had caused Geoffrey to be silent about Antoinette's singular beauty, her sufficient fortune, and her patrician lineage in his letters to Queen's Square, Mrs. Challoner imagined that Miss Endsleigh was a young person of few charms, little money, and no particular family, who would be very grateful for being welcomed to one of the best houses in what was still the most fashionable square of Bloomsbury, and being taken for daily drives about town in the finest carriage of the Law Quarter. It had not occurred to Mrs. Challoner to look in the 'Peerage and Baronetage' for persons of the name of Endsleigh,—a name that struck the Queen's Square matron as rather plebeian and suggestive of 'odds and ends.'

'Yes,' assented the occasionally satirical Lemuel, in a tone that should have warned

Dorothy she was making a fool of herself, 'tis a poor name in comparison to Fisher. I can't conceive that an Endsleigh ever rose to be Lord Mayor of London.'

On coming to her presence, Dorothy saw at a glance and with secret mortification that Miss Antoinette Endsleigh was no person to be petted by Mrs. Challoner of Queen's Square. Since she charmed Geoffrey by her piquant comeliness in her second conjugal year, Dorothy Challoner had broadened in her face, grown thicker in her short neck, and widened in her waist; and in the process of general expansion she had lost much of the attractiveness that quickened a certain young barrister's pulses in the year of Sir Frederick Fisher's mayoralty. When she took her first view of Antoinette's elegant figure, graceful neck, and serenely noble face, Dorothy Challoner was pained to think how much she had changed for the worse in her appearance.

Disappointed by Antoinette's unusual beauty, the elder Mrs. Challoner soon discovered other grounds for dissatisfaction with Geoffrey's bride, who, on coming to London, made a home for

herself in a ready-furnished cottage on the Bayswater Road, directly opposite the trees of Kensington Gardens, instead of accepting her sister-in-law's invitation to stay in Queen's Square for the rest of the season. Instead of caring to drive about town in Dorothy's grander carriage, Antoinette was content with the fly and one sufficient horse, provided for her especial use by a Bayswater job-master. It pained Dorothy Challoner to discover that, instead of being a mere country cousin, new to London and its attractions, Antoinette had visited the town during three successive seasons. On learning from Geoffrey that Antoinette had been presented to Queen Charlotte in the first of those seasons, and ten days hence would be again presented to Her Majesty, the elder Mrs. Challoner had recourse to her newest edition of the 'Peerage and Baronetage,' and learned more than even the reader knows of the antiquity and grandeur of the two houses of Endsleigh. The lady was not altogether pleased by her last gleanings from the book of social grandeur. They were perhaps the more distasteful to the gleaner, because she remembered

how little interest Antoinette had displayed on hearing that her sister-in-law's father had held the high office of Lord Mayor of London. At the same time Dorothy Challoner had another ground of complaint against Geoffrey's wife, who only the other day had begged her sister-in-law, in the prettiest possible terms, to excuse her for not coming again to the Sunday suppers in Queen's Square. Of course, the suppers were attended by extremely clever people, whose conversation was very entertaining; but Antoinette liked a quiet Sunday, and liked to close it without quite so much gaiety.

It is not wonderful that the following words passed between Lemuel and Dorothy in a confidential hour:

‘I hope, Lemuel, that Antoinette won't give herself airs.’

‘She is not likely to do so. At present she behaves very prettily.’

‘We haven't summered and wintered her yet.’

‘What has she said or done, Dolly, to make you speak in this way?’

‘It would be difficult to say. But I can't

help feeling what I feel. I can feel the pride in her nature without measuring her words, just as I can feel frost in the air without looking at a thermometer. Sooner or later, she'll prove mighty proud of her family. I see it in the set of her head and the shape of her neck.'

'You mayn't wish to hang her, because she has a graceful neck, and a pretty face. Has she said anything to offend you?'

'When I told her that my father had been Lord Mayor, she only said "Yes?"—just in that way, with an exasperating little note of interrogation, so as to imply "Well, what of it?" I did not see all her meaning at the time, but I see it now. She doesn't think much of "*my* family."'

'Probably not. Lord Mayors and city knights are not of much account to old county families. Doubtless, she has the views, and possibly the failings, of her class. In judging her, we must remember that she *does* come of rather grand people.'

'And she declines to come again on a Sunday evening.'

'I can't be angry with her for that. 'Twas

unfortunate that all the noisiest people came, and made more noise than usual, on those two evenings, and that Rawlins wanted to go to the card-room before the clock had struck twelve. I am sure she put the case to us very prettily. Don't you remember how she kissed both of us, and begged us to believe her to be very sensible of our kindness to her?'

'She spoke prettily enough; but all the same for that, Lemuel, she has drawn the line between *our* life and *their* life. And, now that Mrs. *Geoffrey* Challoner is going to court, I should like to know when Mrs. Challoner is to be presented.'

'You shall be presented in good time. Wait till I am Attorney-General. In the meantime, be the good-tempered, generous Dorothy you have ever been. If Antoinette isn't exactly the right sister-in-law for us, you must make the best of her for dear Geoffrey's sake (to whom you have always been so good), and for my sake.'

'I'll make the best of her. My fear is that, sooner or later, she won't make the best of me. I wish she wasn't so tall, and didn't look at one

so steadily with those enormous grey eyes. It isn't right for a girl, who blushes so often, to be so cool and calm and self-possessed, even when she is blushing.'

Something in these last words caused Lemuel to laugh heartily, before he remarked,

'That's only her way, Dorothy. People aren't all made alike.'

'Geoffrey,' returned Dorothy Challoner, 'ought to have been more communicative. If he had told us in his letters from Bath all about her height and her good looks, and her fortune and her exalted family, we should have known what to expect.'

'He might as well have written more freely,' said the barrister, taking up the packet of papers which he had brought from chambers, in order to read them before going to bed. 'But the dear boy held his pen on those matters, out of consideration for our feelings.'

From its beginning, the intercourse of the sisters-in-law was attended with friction. Each was on guard against the other. Whilst Antoinette deemed 'the best woman on the earth's surface' a common-place and uninteresting

person, Dorothy Challoner suffered from an irritating sense of inferiority to her tall, elegant, well-descended sister-in-law. A line, which promised to broaden, had been drawn between their lives, though they maintained a decorous show of sisterly sociability,—exchanging calls every week and dinners every fortnight, meeting by appointment at theatres and evening-parties, and admiring each other's clothes, after the wont of sisters-in-law, living in the same town on friendly terms. Dorothy could not complain that her children were slighted by their aunt Geoffrey. Giving them presents upon presents all round, Antoinette tipped the boys munificently when they went off to school, and seized every opportunity for taking the little two-years-old Clemaine to her arms.

‘I must say,’ Dorothy remarked in confidence to her husband, ‘that Antoinette does behave very prettily to our girl. But then, what woman could help doating on such a beauty? With all her good looks, Mrs. Geoffrey Challoner is not likely to have a lovelier child than Clemaine.’

When the time approached for Lieutenant

Challoner's return to H.M.S. *Atropos*, his young wife was preparing for her voyage to Malta, where she had determined to reside so long as Geoffrey's ship should be in the Mediterranean. It was the first of several voyages she made to remote naval stations, in order to be nearer and more accessible to her husband than she would be if she remained in England, whilst he was at sea.

'Write to me now and then, Dorothy,' said the younger sister-in-law, on the occasion of her farewell call in Queen's Square, 'for I shall think of you and long for news about you. I have come to like you very much. I shouldn't have come to like you so much as I do, if you had been all that Geoffrey used to declare you. Shortly before my marriage, he almost made me jealous by his extravagant praise of you.'

Had she not been a common-place woman, Dorothy Challoner would have been agreeably tickled by the candour of this *naïve* confession. But the elder Mrs. Challoner had no sense of humour.

'It was only natural for Geoffrey to think too well of me,' she remarked, with needless gravity,

‘for he has a grateful heart, and I have been very good to him.’

‘To me also you have been very good, Dorothy, and I am not wholly incapable of gratitude,’ rejoined Antoinette, as she regarded her sister-in-law with brimming eyes, and gave her the last of a long series of farewell kisses.

Some few hours later, Dorothy Challoner remarked to her husband,

‘Antoinette was quite cordial at the *very* last moment. Indeed, she seemed more than half-inclined to cry about it. But she needn’t have chosen such a time for reminding me how immensely inferior I am to what Geoffrey used to think me. She might just as well have been silent on that point.’

CHAPTER III.

WORDS OUT OF SEASON.

FIVE years had passed since her departure from England for Malta, when Antoinette Challoner reappeared in London, and deemed herself fortunate in finding her former nest in the Bayswater Road tenantless. Alas, for the poor lady, that she needed no larger home than the cottage of eight rooms !

Those years had been fruitful of change at No. 11, Queen's Square. Having continued to prosper in his profession, Lemuel Challoner had taken the coif, and was well to the fore in the Common Pleas. With his fine practice in Westminster Hall and his leading position on circuit, Mr. Serjeant Challoner was set on entering parliament and winning his way to the bench by political service. The serjeant's two

sons were still at school, the elder at Eton and the younger at Harrow; but they were big boys, looking forward to frolicsome days at Oxford or Cambridge. Little Clemaine, with her roseate colour and golden hair, was nearing the close of her eighth year, and had found her first flatterer in a fashionable governess, who passed straight from a duchess's school-room to Mrs. Challoner's patronage. Sir Frederick Fisher had again figured as Lord Mayor, and, with a reputation for being very rich, was still attentive to business in Mark Lane, and immersed in Stock Exchange speculations, though he had entered his seventieth year. Dorothy Challoner had gone on growing in face, neck, waist, and self-complacence. It is not surprising that the comely matron had a good opinion of herself; for she was prosperous, and one of those common-place women who regard their prosperity as evidence of their moral excellence.

Fortune had been less benignant to the Geoffrey Challoners. The sailor was still only a lieutenant, and, now that European affairs were moving to peace that promised to endure, his look-out at the Admiralty had become less hope-

ful. Miss Rebecca Endsleigh of Bath had died during Antoinette's absence from England, and the latter was in no degree consoled for her bereavement by the acquisition of one-half of her aunt's six hundred a-year. The case was different with Antoinette's first cousin, Sir Peregrine Endsleigh, baronet, of Scoone's Court, Somerset, who twelve months later let Scoone's Court to a retired Anglo-Indian judge, and by means of Aunt Rebecca's seasonable legacy contrived to pass the remaining years of his inglorious existence on the Continent, without any worse discomfort than the disease of chronic discontent.

During her sojourn in Malta, Antoinette endured sharper grief than the sorrow she felt for her aunt's death. The cup of bliss, for which she had uttered many an earnest prayer, fell to the ground even as she was on the point of raising it to her lips. The babe, that came to Mrs. Geoffrey Challoner's embrace at the close of her second conjugal year, died on the third day of its existence, and it had been replaced by no other infant, when Antoinette re-entered the cottage in the Bayswater Road.

How many bitter tears fell from Antoinette's large grey eyes for this disappointment of her strong desire for offspring! And she had the more reason to weep, because she knew that Geoffrey, with his almost feminine fondness for children, longed to be a father no less steadily than she longed to be a mother.

The piece of fine muslin which she embroidered for the christening robe of her first-born offspring was not made up for the babe, who breathed for so brief a span, before it was committed to its Maltese grave. In the first instance the pattern of the satin-stitch was simple enough; but the muslin, which accompanied Antoinette to several distant parts of the world, came in the course of years to be strangely overladen with embroidery. Going with its worker wherever she went, this piece of work was taken from Malta to London, from England to St. Louard's Island, from the West Indies to Canada. There is no need to give the perfect list of all the places to which those yards of fine muslin were carried by Antoinette Challoner. Whenever she became strongly hopeful of soon becoming a mother, Antoinette

fell to work on the muslin. No wonder she prized the pathetic memorial of so many births and deaths of tender hope. How many happy hours had she spent over the work! How often had she put it away with a sorrowful heart!

Antoinette Challoner was still in the closing stage of one of those visitations of successive elation, anxiety, and unutterable wretchedness, to which she was liable at irregular intervals, when she ordered her carriage, and bravely went forth to call at No. 11, Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, though she mistrusted her ability to maintain a proper show of cheerfulness during the long half-hour which she intended to pass in her sister-in-law's drawing-room and society. In truth, she was sick at heart, and quite unfit for the effort; but, as Lemuel Challoner's wife had grown somewhat captious as well as more consequential, Antoinette was set on making this visit, for the sake of family peace. The poor gentlewoman had better have been a little less courageous, and have deferred the visit for another twenty-four hours. Not that Dorothy welcomed the visitor with less

than her usual cordiality. On the contrary, Mrs. Challoner of Queen's Square was more than sufficiently gracious to the sister-in-law, whom she had come to regard as 'rather a poor thing, after all,' for continuing to fret about that little baby in Malta. Kissing Antoinette heartily on each cheek, Dorothy said never a word about the length of the time (*ten* whole days) that had elapsed since Mrs. Geoffrey Challoner's last call. What with talk about the new opera, recent dances in the Law Quarter, the boys' last letters from school, Clemaine's marvellous cleverness, and a certain lovely amber-satin dress which the serjeant had recently given Clemaine's fortunate mother, a short half-hour went off right pleasantly. Had Antoinette taken her departure when Dorothy ceased to descant on the richness, delicacy, and cost *per yard* of the lovely amber-satin, there might have been no occasion for this book.

Reverting from the excellences of the lovely dress to Clemaine's miraculous cleverness, Dorothy invited Mrs. Geoffrey Challoner to accompany her to the middle window of the drawing-room, for the chance of getting a view of the

incomparable Clemaine, at that moment taking part of her daily exercise in the Square garden, under the surveillance of Miss Fripp the governess.

‘See, see,’ cried the excited mother, when she and Antoinette had been at the window little more than two minutes, ‘there she goes along “full tear,” like a very angel. Was there ever such an angel in short petticoats?’

As the mother began this characteristic outpouring of maternal delight, the angel in short petticoats could be seen running at her fullest speed in a race against two small boys who ran well, and an awkward girl who was considerably older and taller than Clemaine. In the opening decades of the present century, it was usual for English girls of Clemaine’s age to wear their hair in close crop. But Clemaine wore her golden hair in long uncurled tresses, floating over her shoulders; and a very charming creature she was, as she ran quickly over the grass, three good yards in front of her competitors in the race. The child’s hat had fallen from her head, so that the spectators of her angelic running could see her finely-cut features and flowing locks to perfection.

‘Isn’t it a pretty sight?’

‘She looks the very picture of health!’ returned Antoinette, thinking to herself sadly and bitterly: ‘Why is it that this woman has so lovely a child, whilst I am childless?’

‘She has been out almost her full hour,’ cried the exultant Dorothy. ‘I will send for her, Antoinette, so that you may have a kiss from her lovely lips, before you go back to Bayswater.’

‘No, no, Dorothy, you shan’t do that. She looks so happy. Let her be out for her full hour.’

‘Well, that’s very good of you to say so. For I know, Antoinette, you would like a kiss.’

‘I prefer seeing her at play. She’ll be back again in a minute.’

‘Lor’, my dear Antoinette,’ ejaculated the common-place woman, doing a cruel thing with no unkindly purpose, ‘how I do wish you had just such a darling!’

Turning away in order that her rising tears should not be seen by her companion, Antoinette Challoner went from the window and seated herself on a sofa. But the movement failed to achieve its purpose. Dorothy had discerned the rising tears, and the significant writhing of

Antoinette's lips, as the sufferer was in the act of turning from the window,

‘There, now,’ thought Mrs. Geoffrey Chaloner, ‘she is off again, crying for that poor little baby of hers,—dead by this time for four years, after living only three days. What a poor thing she is, after all! I really must tell her that she ought to be braver, and to behave better.’

‘There, there, my dear,’ expostulated the elder sister-in-law, seating herself on the sofa by Antoinette's side, ‘you shouldn't do that. Indeed you shouldn't,—it is not worthy of you, my dear. And really it is wrong of you to go so near to murmuring against the Almighty, as though He didn't know what is best for His creatures, and hadn't as much right to take away a blessing as to give it. And no amount of crying, Antoinette, will bring the little dear back again. Other women have lost children. Heaven only knows how I felt losing two sweet babes one after another,—but I made an effort, and cheered up, and so must you,—you really must, if you don't wish people to think you quite a poor thing.’

To Antoinette these words of admonition were the more distressing, because they were spoken in a voice something louder than Dorothy's ordinary tone.

‘Dorothy,’ replied Antoinette calmly, doing her best to control her feelings, ‘some weeks since I told you that references to my great trouble pained me acutely, and you promised never again to allude to it in my hearing. You made me that promise.’

‘So I did,’ returned Dorothy, taking the reproof in good part, ‘and I ought to have kept my word. I won’t break it again. But I do so want to see you happier. You must try to cheer up. Remember, my dear, if you have no children of your own, you have *mine* to love,—and you have my leave to love *them* as much as you like. Till you have children of your own, you should try to think of *my* children as your own. Lor’, my dear Antoinette, just think how it will be all the better for them one day if Geoffrey and you have no child! It ought to comfort you to think of that.’

The elder Mrs. Challoner would have spoken more fully of this source of comfort for her

sister-in-law, had not Antoinette sprung to her feet and ejaculated in her agony,

‘This is unendurable!—it is cruelty!—it is insult!’

‘Don’t go,—do sit down again!’

But the invalid did not, could not comply with the entreaty. Without speaking a word of farewell, Antoinette fled from the room, ran down the stairs, and escaped from the house of torture. The elder Mrs. Challoner was still at the height of her astonishment at her sister-in-law’s passionate words and sudden departure, when Lemuel Challoner came into the drawing-room from the adjoining chamber in which he had been writing letters throughout the long half-hour of Antoinette’s unfortunate visit.

The courts were not sitting that day, and Serjeant Challoner, after receiving half-a-dozen solicitors in the forenoon, had returned early from chambers, in order to write half-a-dozen non-professional letters in a room furnished to pay the double debt of library and card-room, that, like his wife’s chief chamber of audience, overlooked the green leaves and grass of the Square garden. When he found himself with

a few spare hours in the afternoon, the serjeant was wont to spend them in dealing with arrears of private and non-legal correspondence, sitting behind an open door, so that he could overhear the talk of Mrs. Challoner's drawing-room, whilst he blotted sheets of letter-paper with a galloping quill.

‘By Jove, Dolly, you’ve thrown the fat on the fire!’ ejaculated Serjeant Challoner, as the sound of Antoinette’s retreating wheels rose from the pavement below.

‘Who would have thought of her exploding in that fashion, like a barrel of gunpowder, just because I touched her as lightly as a feather with a few words of counsel and encouragement?’

‘’Tis a pity you touched on that particular subject.’

‘I was wrong,’ replied Dorothy Challoner contritely, ‘I see how wrong I was. I ought to have kept my promise never to allude to her baby, poor little thing! I will write to her and beg her pardon this very moment. Don’t be angry with me, Lemuel!’

‘As if I should be angry with you,’ returned the always good-humored husband, raising his wife’s

white but chumpy right-hand to his lips. 'You were imprudent, but you meant well.'

'Indeed, indeed I did,' said Dorothy, showing a disposition to whimper.

'Don't cry. There's nothing to cry about, even though she should make a storm of this little breeze to Geoffrey. It will all come right in a few days, if you keep quiet. Don't be in a hurry to write to her. Perhaps there will be no need for the apology. Anyhow, don't put pen to paper till I tell you. 'Tis fortunate that I kept in the back-ground, and that you didn't let her know I was in the house. It would be a worse business, if she knew I overheard what passed between you.'

Unfortunately, though she did not see him, Antoinette knew that her brother-in-law was writing letters in the library, whilst she was being 'lectured' by his wife, and that he was an auditor of 'the lecture.' During every pause in the talk, and once or twice whilst her sister-in-law was expatiating on the virtues of the lovely amber dress, Antoinette's quick ears had caught the scratching and squeaking of the serjeant's quill, as it galloped from left to right across the

letter-paper. Had not the excitement of mental torture overpowered Antoinette, she would have closed her call on Dorothy by popping into the card-room library, and saying merrily,

‘How d’y’do, and good-bye, Lemuel. If you don’t wish Dorothy’s callers to know you are writing letters behind the open door, you should make less noise with your pen.’

Before ‘the lecture’ began, Antoinette had determined on taking her leave thus brightly.

Though she had no intention of ‘making a storm out of the breeze to Geoffrey,’ the whole affair came to his knowledge from Antoinette’s honest lips. As he returned from the *Fighting Services* in time to hand her from her carriage, and as he insisted on knowing the cause of the tell-tale redness of her eyelids, Mrs. Geoffrey could not keep the cause from him. Compelled to speak, she told the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

‘’Tis nothing of importance,’ she began. ‘I was not so well as I imagined myself, when I started for Queen’s Square; where that dear, well-meaning, stupid Dorothy worried me. I was so foolish as to break down, and . . . There,

there, I have told you enough. Don't examine me. I am all well, now that I have cried off my annoyance.'

But Geoffrey insisted on hearing the whole story, and, though he heard it to the last word without giving expression to wrath, Antoinette was secretly troubled by the hard look that came over his honest face during the last sentences of the recital.

Next morning Lemuel Challoner received from Geoffrey a letter, which caused the addressee to observe, as he committed the epistle to his breast-pocket, instead of pitching it across the breakfast-table to his wife :

'There is no need for you to see that out-pouring of fraternal fervour. Galfridus ebulliens ! the poor boy is ferocious ! I was afraid Antoinette would make mischief ; and the sick woman has done her worst. It will all come right. But you must hold your pen to Mrs. Geoffrey till I give you leave to use it ; and you must keep out of her way till she has ceased to be dangerous.'

Of the letter, which moved Serjeant Challoner to speak thus bitterly and authoritatively,

it is enough to say that, after setting forth the particulars of Dorothy's offences, Geoffrey closed the epistle with these words :

‘What I think of Mrs. Challoner’s cruelty, I have made sufficiently clear. Make it no less clear to me what I ought to think of you. Antoinette did not see you, but she left Queen’s Square under the impression that, whilst she and Mrs. Challoner were in the drawing-room, you were writing in the next room, and that, as the door between the two rooms was open, you heard all that your wife said. I am slow to believe that you sat there, hearing the words of cruelty and insult, and forbearing to save poor Antoinette from the lash of Mrs. Challoner’s tongue. Was Antoinette’s impression true or erroneous? I must beg you to answer this question by return of post. One word will suffice.’

Lemuel’s reply was more characteristic than conciliatory :

‘DEAR GEOFF,

‘You are off your head, and we had better not meet till you have cooled down.

When you have come to your right mind, I shall be happy to talk to you on a matter about which I must decline to write. I *was* writing letters in the library, and I heard all the words that gave offence, and they have my approval, though I regret the turn taken by the conversation. Your hard words have neither broken my bones, nor affected my regard for my only brother. If I don't see you in the course of ten days, I shall call early on the eleventh day (Sunday) and set this silly business right.

‘L. C.’

‘Antoinette was not mistaken,’ groaned Geoffrey Challoner, when he perused the unfeeling note, ‘and he *was* his wife’s accomplice ! He sat behind the door, exulting in the pain inflicted by his cruel wife. To think of his having fallen so low ! Never brighter and keener in mind than now, he has sunk to her moral level !’

The letters had put it beyond Lemuel’s power to ‘set the silly business right.’ Greatly as they differed in person and mind, the brothers had some strong points of resemblance in temper

and disposition, though Geoffrey, with his flawless sincerity and absolute freedom from vanity, was greatly Lemuel's superior. They both had strong affections. Each resembled the other in having a temper, that came to him straight from the evil one, besides the more amiable disposition by which he was best known to his acquaintance. Even by the people who resented his caustic flippancy, and had suffered most acutely from his satire, it was admitted that Serjeant Challoner had a kind heart. In respect to those 'other tempers,' that came to them straight from the evil one, Lemuel was a less faulty man than his younger brother, by reason of his inferior ability to nurse resentment. Making enemies with a light heart, Lemuel forgave his enemies quickly; but Geoffrey, while almost faultless in his better and habitual nature, was no less implacable in his few hatreds than steady in his many friendships.

Moreover, both were idolatrous husbands. Whilst some families are poor, others are curiously rich, in the conjugal virtues. It ran in the Challoner blood to be good husbands. In all their branches the Challoners had from time

to time produced bad men, but never (at least, in recent times) had they given the world a bad husband. Throughout our Georgian period their motto should have been 'For King and Wife.' Loyal to the crown, they were devoted to their wives. Whatever woman a Challoner married, he was sure to think her perfection. Impatient of dullness in everybody else, the brilliant Lemuel Challoner thought his wife's common-place stupidity entertaining, and even admirable. Under the world's observation, he treated her uniformly with tender deference. If he sometimes satirized her in their hours of privacy, he did so from no desire to give her pain, but simply because it amused him to see how insensible she was to his sarcasms. Had she ever winced under one of his humorous sallies, he would have desisted from one of his favourite games. Whilst Antoinette was in Geoffrey's regard an angel from paradise, Lemuel had no doubt that his Dorothy was, what Geoffrey had once declared her to Miss Antoinette Endsleigh, 'the very best woman on the earth's surface.'

When they had exchanged high words in

writing, it was a poor chance that the storm would pass over quickly. Geoffrey having forborne to call on Lemuel within the ten days, Serjeant Challoner went forth on the eleventh day to call in the Bayswater Road, hoping to find his brother at home, whilst his sister-in-law would be at church. The serjeant would have had his walk from Bloomsbury in vain, had he not accidentally looked to the left as he was on the point of turning out of Kensington Gardens, and caught sight of Geoffrey, walking slowly in the direction of the Kensington Road. Though he had no doubt that Geoffrey was sauntering in the Gardens, in order to avoid the early caller, Serjeant Challoner thought it best to follow his brother with quick steps and ‘have it out with him.’

A few minutes later, the brothers stood face to face, with rustling green leaves overhead and no strangers near enough to catch their words.

‘Come, Geoff,’ said the serjeant, in a conciliatory tone, but with insufficient tact, ‘let us shake hands, and blow away this cloud with some honest laughter at our folly. It would be

too absurd for us to quarrel because our wives have had a foolish tiff.'

Forbearing to take Lemuel's proffered hand, Geoffrey answered :

'I am not surprised to hear you speak contemptuously of your own wife. You are at liberty to do so. But you had better be silent about Antoinette.'

There is no need for a *verbatim* report of all that followed this opening of an interview which Geoffrey had tried to avoid. Whilst the younger brother was furious about the barbarous assault on Antoinette's feelings, the elder was indignant at the charge of cruelty preferred against 'the very best woman on the earth's surface.' To Geoffrey's disdainful reference to Lemuel's part in the barbarous assault, Serjeant Challoner replied by taunting the sailor with his meanness in accepting the words of a sick woman as conclusive evidence against his own brother. The high words were very high, though the altercation was not so noisy as to strike the ears of the loiterers in the broad walk.

Those words of war were the last words that the brothers were permitted to exchange. Had

they both lived for twenty, or even ten years, they would have been drawn together again by their strong mutual affection. But, alas! Geoffrey sailed for the West Indies without seeing his brother again; and, when the sailor reappeared in England, the lawyer was dead. Nor was there postal intercourse between the brothers whilst Geoffrey was on the North American and West Indian station. Had he learned from the newspapers how a gun accident killed the elder of his two nephews, when the fine young fellow was still in his first year at Christ Church, Geoffrey would have written his brother a letter that would have put an end to their quarrel. But the news of Lemuel's death came to the sailor sooner than the news of the much earlier misadventure. Apart from the notice taken by the public journals of the serjeant's doings in the law-courts, and of his unsuccessful contest for a seat in parliament, Geoffrey heard literally nothing of his brother's fortune in England, until he learned from the *Times* that Lemuel's bright career had closed all too soon.

Extinguishing in an instant the animosity he

had nursed against Lemuel for more than five years, that doleful intelligence revived all Geoffrey's former admiration and tenderness for his brother, to whom he could never again express either sentiment. Life would henceforth have gone better with Geoffrey, could he have reflected with an easy conscience on his part in the bitter quarrel, and could he, on the death of his wrath against his beloved brother, have forgiven Dorothy Challoner for her share in the discord. But, unfortunately for his peace of mind, Geoffrey could not forget the bitter words he had spoken and written to the brother who was so devoted and beneficent to him in his boyhood, youth, and early manhood. To the last year of his life, there were moments when the generous seaman recalled with sharp remorse how he had rejected Lemuel's hand, and well-intentioned, though ungraceful overture for reconciliation. Till the closing term of his existence, he softened in no degree to Dorothy Challoner, 'the woman who' (to use one of his own expressions) 'had robbed him of his brother.' In truth, it seemed as though all the heat and rancour of his extinguished wrath

against his brother were transferred and super-added to the animosity with which he regarded the woman to whose malice he attributed the supreme sorrow of his life.

Soon after her return from Quebec to London, when Lemuel Challoner had been several months in his grave, Antoinette bethought herself that she would do her best to bring about the reconciliation of Geoffrey and Dorothy. Having soon survived her resentment against her sister-in-law, Antoinette had for nearly five years been debating what steps she could take for the restoration of harmony in her husband's family, when death closed the discord of the brothers. And, for as long a time, the woman of fine sensibility had been growing more and more regretful for her share in the miserable dissension. She could reflect with an easy conscience on having told Geoffrey of an affair which, during her last drive from Queen's Square to the Bayswater cottage, she had designed to withhold from his knowledge. Had he not returned home sooner than he had intended, and she had expected, he would have seen no signs of unusual distress in her face. But, when he

insisted on knowing the cause of her trouble, the course she took was the only course open to her.

She was also easy in her conscience respecting the way in which she complied with his request. In no particular had she overstated the case against Dorothy. In answering one of Geoffrey's most searching questions, she was careful to say that she had not seen Lemuel in the card-room. Her conscience assured her that she had not intentionally made mischief. But to the same sensitive conscience it was painfully clear that she was the chief cause of her husband's deplorable rupture with his elder brother. Had she only controlled her feelings so as to leave Queen's Square without a scene, she would have returned to her home without the tell-tale redness in her eyes; and had she, on alighting from her carriage in the Bayswater Road, met her husband with a serene and happy face, the lamentable quarrel would not have taken place. She should have been more patient under the provocation against which she had protested so passionately. There were times when Antoinette's acute contrition for her

disastrous impatience caused her to feel that, to cancel the consequences of her culpable vehemence, she would gladly sacrifice everything that was precious to her, except her husband's love and happiness.

‘I should like to call on poor Dorothy,’ said Antoinette to Geoffrey, not long after their return to London from the other side of the Atlantic.

‘With my approval?’ rejoined Geoffrey.

‘Of course. I could neither call on her, nor write to her, without your approval. Had I better write before calling?’

‘You are at liberty to do what you please; but you will neither call nor write with my approval,’ replied Geoffrey Challoner, rising from the breakfast-table to pace three times up and down the room, before he spoke another word.

There was a terrible brightness in the husband's strong eyes, and a still more alarming hardness in his powerful though unsymmetrical face, when he desisted from ‘pacing the deck,’ and, looking steadily in Antoinette's face, spoke these words, in a low voice of unalterable resolution :

‘It is impossible for you to wish me to hold friendly intercourse with my worst enemy. You would not like me to be guilty of the falseness of feigning brotherly affection for the woman who robbed me of my brother. I have not the power to make my heart love its enemies. I can no more govern the hate than the love of my nature. I am their servant. Mrs. Challoner and her children do not need my help. My brother, no doubt, made due provision for her and them; and she is the daughter of a rich man, who is under an obligation to divide his wealth equally between her and her two brothers. She has, therefore, no need of my assistance, and she is never likely to need it. Should she, by strange mischance, come to need it, should she fall into distress and require my aid, I will aid her with a prompt and free hand, but unrelentingly. Of my own free will, I will never speak with her again in this life.’

Antoinette Challoner was far too clever a woman, and had far too good reasons for reverencing her husband, to imagine that her authority over him was limitless, because he always over-rated her merits, and seldom exercised his marital power without showing, at

the same time, delicate consideration for her feelings. By the light of his strangely powerful eyes she now saw one of the limits of her authority over Geoffrey; and, though she was sincerely desirous of returning to friendly relations with Lemuel Challoner's widow, she was happier, even at the very moment of the mortifying repulse, for seeing that she must yield to his will on a question that touched some of her deepest feelings, and for observing how far her idolatrous worshipper was from being her mere slave.

So Antoinette Challoner neither called upon her sister-in-law, nor wrote to her; and the two sets of Challoners remained apart, even as near kindred in this perplexing world so often remain apart from one another, in obedience to overpowering resentments, that originated in idle words and apparently trivial dissonances of temper.

CHAPTER IV.

GOSSIP CORNER.

As she was designed on new lines to be the fastest warship of her size and guns in the British Navy, and was destined for service on the only station that just then offered sailors a prospect of distinguishing themselves in action, the *Troubridge* had for many months been a thing of high interest to the naval members of the *Fighting Services' Club*, Pall Mall, and an object of peculiar concern to officers who had been idling on half-pay longer than they liked.

Of the thirty and more candidates for the command of the new ship, Captain Grievance, R.N., and Captain Crabtree, R.N., were not the least careful to conciliate the Lords Commissioners and the chief permanent officials of the department set in authority over the floating

service. Showing themselves with something more than sufficient frequency at levees, they found occasions, that would have been missed by ordinary men, for exchanging social amenities with the leaders and rulers of their profession. Given to exaggerate woman's influence over our naval affairs, they were at pains to ingratiate themselves with influential woman-kind. Dancing from midnight to cockcrow at the Countess of Kidderminster's balls, they were no less energetic in the service of Mrs. Vivian Clamptett, who was believed to do what she pleased with her excellent husband, the chief secretary of the Admiralty, credited just then with doing what he liked with those lordships, whom he served with official obedience and humility.

It had for some time been Captain Grievance's practice to call on Mrs. Vivian Clamptett at least once in every ten days; but his calls upon the lady became less frequent after he caught Crabtree in her drawing-room, nursing with more than paternal tenderness a sleeping infant—the youngest and fairest of the lady's lovely offspring.

‘As I could not compete on equal terms,’ Captain Grievance remarked, with much severity, to his little cousin and great admirer, Lieutenant Crony, R.N., ‘with a man capable of nursing his interest at the Admiralty in that fashion, I shall leave him to the undisturbed enjoyment of Mrs. Vivian Clampett’s good opinion and beautiful baby.’

But the interest taken in the new ship by the sailors of the *Fighting Services* from the earliest stage of her construction till the day of her baptism was tame in comparison with the excitement that came to the club on a certain summerly day of 1835, from an announcement in the ministerial morning paper. The journal was too well-planted in the confidence of the Government and the departments for anyone at the club to doubt the information, that Captain Geoffrey Challoner, R.N., would appear in the next gazette as captain in command of H.M.S. *Troubridge*, under orders to sail for the African coast. What news! How could it be accounted for? Challoner was a good bit over fifty. He had been shelved for years, and had grown content with his place on the shelf. Five years

had passed since he had paid his last visit to Vivian Clampett's room at the Admiralty. Living at some place in the country, where he was understood to be working at his 'History of the English Navy,' he spent only two months of every year in London, and during those annual months seldom 'showed' at the *Fighting Services*, so busy was he with grubbing at the old documents of the Record Offices. A man of no particular family—that is, no family to talk about—he was not known to have any 'connection,' or even a solitary friend, amongst 'the great.' No third-rate city merchant could be more out of 'the swim' of London society. If he and the 'first Lord' (to wit, the Earl of Kidderminster) were to meet on the same pavement of Regent Street, they would pass without greeting. Captain Challoner, R.N., was a rank outsider. Yet this outsider, this dark horse, had carried off the prize for which some of the best men of 'the service' had been competing.

The first man to leave the breakfast-room that morning, after reading his letters and skimming his morning paper, was Rear-Admiral Sir Andrew Fullalove, K.C.B.,—a tall and rather

slight old man, with drooping shoulders, a fine aquiline profile, a head well-covered with snow-white hair, and an air of delicacy and languor that accorded with the serenity of his handsome face. Something of a fop still, this picturesque veteran, who in his heyday had been the handsomest of the dandies about town, crossed the great hall of the big club-house and went to his usual place on 'the admirals' bench,' (a luxuriously fitted, spring-seated bench) in 'gossip corner.' There seating himself, the old admiral remained alone for some five minutes, still as a piece of sculpture, with both his hands resting on the head of his stout cane,—waiting patiently till some of 'the boys' should join him in the corner for a gossip. Every man under forty years of age was 'a boy' to the admiral, who rather pleased the oldest of his boys by speaking of them as youngsters.

Critics of our London buildings are in the habit of saying that the architect of the *Fighting Services' Club* wasted a great deal of valuable space in giving the club-house a hall so grandly disproportionate to its requirements. But critics of buildings are no more infallible

than critics of books, who are sometimes curiously blind to the merits of the present writer's almost faultless works. No doubt the hall is larger in area and loftier than any other hall of its kind in the whole town. But no one can be an *habitué* of the great hall, either as a member or a visitor, and think any considerable proportion of its cubic feet could have been turned to better account. The stranger, who, after penetrating the club's outer vestibule, finds himself for the first time in the stately chamber, is agreeably impressed by its noble amplitude and picturesque dignity. Much of what is most glorious in our national history may be recalled from the portraits and pictures of battle by land and sea that decorate the walls. To enter the hall in weariness during any forenoon or afternoon of the London season, and to repose on one of the many luxurious settees that are ranged against its walls, is to realize how rest may be enjoyed in the midst of restlessness, and even peace be found in a place so far from peaceful. The club may have its faults. Some of its members assure me it is, and ever has been, the most expensive and the

worst-managed club in all clubland. But I never heard any of these grumblers speak disrespectfully of their grandest *salon de compagnie*.

Curious readers must pardon my inability to tell them when and why the corner, to which Admiral Fullalove passed on emerging from the breakfast-room—a corner no more consecrated to idle conversation than any other part of the superb chamber—was first designated ‘gossip corner.’ I have also failed to discover how the seat on which the picturesque veteran took a place—a settee neither differing in show and comfort from the other settees of the hall, nor reserved by any rule for the highest order of naval seamen—came to be called ‘the admirals’ bench.’ It may be that the seat was so styled because certain superannuated admirals of former time preferred it to the other settees for being out of the way of draughts from doors and windows. It may be that the seat acquired its distinguishing title more recently, and would have missed the honourable designation, had not so delightful and popular an admiral as Sir Andrew Fullalove, K.C.B., made it through many years his habitual resting-place, when he enjoyed the

gossip in the vast room. But these are only plausible conjectures for the settlement of an equally obscure and momentous question.

‘Well, admiral,’ said Captain Grievance, R.N., who was the first of ‘the boys’ to join Sir Andrew in the corner; ‘have you got over your first surprise at the morning’s news; the noise of the big shell that has burst amongst us?’

‘Yes,’ returned the veteran, with his clear and gentle voice. ‘I have come out of my first surprise. It will take me longer to survive my satisfaction.’

‘To be sure, you know the man. I forgot that. I came to you for consolation, for I wanted that ship for myself. Can’t you manage to say you are sorry for my disappointment?’

‘Forgive me for being glad,’ returned the admiral, in a tone of apologetic entreaty. ‘You see, Grievance, he is an older friend than you are. He entered the navy as midshipman on board my old ship the *Pelican*, in the channel fleet. Then he was one of my lieutenants in the Mediterranean, on board the *Atropos*. And, some time later, he and I went together to the

West Indies, when I had the *Vulture*. We were shipmates so often and for so many years, that I *must* rejoice with him.'

'And he was always a favourite with you?'

'With me—with *everybody*!'

'He does not look you up so often at this place,' suggested Captain Crabtree, R.N., who had come to the corner together with three or four other satisfied consumers of breakfast. 'Two years have passed since I saw him here.'

'He dined here only a fortnight or so since. He had stumbled across Charley Stonnor—the Marquis of Manningtree, I mean; I beg his lordship's pardon—and they came in for dinner. Finding me in the library, they would have me join their table, and crack a bottle over old times. The marquis was in *our* "service" for a few years before he went soldiering. He was with me and Challoner in the West Indies.'

'Humph! that's it,' said a fourth gossip-monger, making his first contribution to the talk. 'Then *he* had a great man at his back. Prudent fellow; having caught his young peer years since in the West Indies, he held fast to him and trained him to good purpose. Princes mayn't

be good people to trust to ; but sometimes it is profitable to use your prince without confiding over much in him.'

A flush of excitement, even of displeasure, was perceptible in the admiral's face, as he replied, with perfect good-humour,

'Charley Stonnor was not a great man when he was in the West Indies ; and, if he had been heir-apparent instead of only a distant cousin to the then Marquis of Manningtree, Geoffrey Challoner was the last man in the world to think of *using* the future prince. That was not Geoffrey Challoner's way. In the West Indies, Geoffrey Challoner was a bigger man than the future Lord Manningtree. And, if it had not been for Geoffrey Challoner, my midshipman Charley Stonnor would never have lived to be a peer.'

'We are in for a romance !' ejaculated gossip-monger No. 5.

'Truth may be romantic,' returned the handsome old admiral, dropping his habitually low voice to a tone of unusual lowness, so that his words should be audible to none but his particular group of friends ; 'and this is just the

truth of the story. Charley Stonnor dropped down with as sharp an attack of fever as any man ever survived. For weeks he lay side by side with death, when he seemed to get a little better; but the apparent improvement did not make me hopeful for him. "Poor boy, he'll go off in the next relapse," I said to Challoner, who had been nursing the lad night and day. "If," said Challoner, "I could only get him to my wife's house on the hills of St. Louard's, she would bring him through it, even yet. St. Louard's is the healthiest island in the West Indies, because every inch of it is under cultivation, and there's always a fresh breeze on the hills at this season." Of course, Challoner had his way with me, and Charley Stonnor was put upon the island, and carried up the hills to Mrs. Challoner, who nursed him till he was strong enough for the voyage to England.'

'And then?' asked two voices together.

'Sick of the sea, Stonnor went into a cavalry regiment, that a few years later was sent to India, where he served his country like a true man, till a strange and rather tragical chapter of accidents put a coronet on his head. 'Tisn't

a full year since he returned to England a great man. So it is not wonderful that Challoner and the marquis joined hands again, no sooner than a fortnight since.'

'And, as a matter of course——' Captain Grievance remarked, in an interrogatory tone.

'Nay, not now. Put the question to me next time we meet, and I'll do my best to answer it,' the admiral interposed, as he rose from the bench. 'Porter, there, stop the next cab!—If I don't look sharp, I shall be too late for the appointment I made yesterday with my lawyer.'

The gossip at the corner languished and came to an end for that forenoon, soon after the admiral had stepped into the first cab.

CHAPTER V.

IT'S ALL OUT.

THREE days after the gossip recorded in the last chapter, soldiers and sailors were sitting in groups about the great hall of the *Fighting Services*, chatting in subdued voices on trifles of the hour, and Rear-Admiral Sir Andrew Fullalove, K.C.B., was in his usual place of his customary corner with Captain Crabtree, R.N., at his side, and three or four 'boys' standing before him, when Captain Grievance, R.N., came quickly towards the knot of friends with a morning newspaper in his hand, and a look of unusual cheerfulness in his habitually severe, not to say lugubrious, visage.

‘It’s all out, admiral!’ said the captain, seating himself at Sir Andrew’s side.

‘Then you won’t be betraying confidence, if

you tell me about it,' returned the veteran. 'It must be good news that makes you look so happy, Grievance.'

'Read it for yourself, Sir Andrew. No, no,—don't trouble to bring out your glasses; I'll read it to you. 'Tis a pretty sequel to some talk we had the other day, and throws full light on the *Troubridge* affair. It's short and to the purpose. "A marriage,"' continued the bearer of intelligence, reading a brief paragraph of fashionable news, "'has been arranged between the Marquis of Manningtree and Lady Clementina Brookfield, third daughter of the Earl and Countess of Kidderminster.'" That's all. Shall I read it again?'

'I think we all heard you.'

'Tells the whole story of the affair,—eh?'

'It certainly seems to throw some light on the affair, as you are pleased to call it,' assented the admiral, whose twinkling eyes and droll smile showed he apprehended the lurking significance of the announcement, and in his quiet way enjoyed it.

'Some light? Where will you look for daylight, if this is anything less than sunlight?' re-

torted Captain Grievance, as he folded his paper and put it into his pocket. 'In the interest of her third daughter, the First Lady of the Admiralty fishes for the best match of the season. All honour to her for being clever at that kind of angling! She was right to bait her hook with the fly most likely to please the big fish. Admiral, I told you I would get to the bottom of this *Troubridge* affair, and I have been as good as my word !'

Closing his eyes for half-a-minute, as though sleep were stealing over him, Sir Andrew opened them before he replied, with a piquant air of judicial impartiality,

'Does not the fierce light, learned brother, cause you to see rather more than appears? It is not clear to me that the lady should figure in the indictment. The evidence shows that the Marquis of Manningtree is on a cordial footing with the First Lord of the Admiralty, and has been so for some little time,—for matches are not made up in a day, and it is not usual to publish such interesting arrangements as soon as they are made. Knowing the First Lord intimately, and standing just now high in his

favour, Charley Stonnor—I can't help calling him by his old name—may have spoken a timely word for his old friend. That's what I see. But, gentlemen of the jury,' (bowing courteously to the good and lawful men duly sworn), 'you must acquit the lady of fishing for the best match of the season, and baiting her hook with a war-ship. No, no, my brother Grievance goes too far. You must acquit the lady !'

'We can't do that, Sir Andrew, for then,' urged Lieutenant Springall, R.N., 'there would be no woman in the business, and all the world knows a woman is at the bottom of every piece of mischief, whether it is high treason or only another Admiralty job.'

'Job is scarcely the right word to use,' Sir Andrew put in quickly, but in a tone of gentle persuasion rather than of severe protest.

'I was careful to call it an affair—the *Troubridge* affair,' said Captain Grievance. 'There is nothing offensive in that expression.'

'Call it the affair, if you like; but let us reserve "job" for its proper use,' Sir Andrew continued pleadingly. 'If you waste good powder by calling Geoffrey Challoner's bit of

good fortune a job, you'll lessen the force of a good word for expressing indignation at a scandalous abuse. This affair, as Grievance calls it, would have been a job if Challoner had shown himself unfit to command a ship. But no member of this or any other naval club is likely to speak of Challoner as anything less than a capable officer.'

'He is capable enough,' put in Captain Crabtree, R.N., in a grudging tone. 'Though he has taken that ship out of my hands, I'll be just to him. He is a capable officer. I go so far. But yesterday, admiral, when we were dining together, you spoke of him as a possible hero, an undiscovered Nelson, a man who had missed greatness only because he was born some forty years too late.'

'We must have been in the second bottle,' returned the veteran cheerily, 'when I talked in that strain. Perhaps I went a little too far. Moderation is apt to fly during the second bottle. Still, Geoffrey Challoner is a man I would rather overpraise than undervalue. He mayn't be an undiscovered Nelson, but even yet you may hear the world call him a hero.'

‘The world has done that for many a man, and has afterwards changed its mind,’ remarked Captain Crabtree, with a nod of encouragement to Lieutenant Springall.

‘And,’ added the admiral, without noticing the captain’s suggestion, ‘if the world should take to crying him up for hero, Geoffrey Challoner will be the first man to ask why people think so much too well of him—the last to discover that people rate him only at his proper value.’

Though it only confirmed him in a strong opinion which he had formed within a few minutes of reading a certain letter, written to him from the Admiralty by his ‘most obedient and humble servant, Vivian Clampett,’ the public announcement of Lord Manningtree’s engagement to Lady Clementina Brookfield was scarcely less interesting to Captain Geoffrey Challoner, than it had proved exciting to Captain Grievance.

After reading Vivian Clampett’s brief and severely formal epistle, Captain Challoner R.N., gave expression to his astonishment in one long peculiar whistle, that caused Mrs. Challoner to look up with a quick glance of enquiry from the

plate and letter to which she had been giving her undivided attention at the close of her luncheon,—a meal of which she and her husband were wont to partake with the smallest possible intervention of their parlour-maid, so as to be able to talk freely to one another about the morning's letters and papers, which seldom failed to arrive at the Laurels, Burnham Regis, just as the silver gong on the hall-table was struck punctually for the mid-day repast.

‘What *has* happened?’ asked Antoinette Challoner, blushing brightly at a sound that would not have caused any other Englishwoman to change colour. The lady had a curious faculty for blushing, of which more will be said on a subsequent page. ‘Something has astonished you? You haven’t whistled in that way for six months.’

‘A letter from the Admiralty,’ answered the lady’s husband. ‘My most obedient and humble servant, Vivian Clampett, has startled me into whistling. Who wouldn’t whistle at such a letter coming to him from the Admiralty after passing so many years on the shelf?’

‘Not a ship? not another ship? That is simply

impossible!' ejaculated Antoinette Challoner, rising quickly from her chair and coming with four steps to her husband's side.

'If the impossible had not a taste for proving itself possible, life would be much tamer than most people find it,' remarked Captain Challoner, as he put the astonishing letter into his wife's hand.

'Joy, joy: oh, what joy for us!' cried Mrs. Challoner, when she had perused the letter, standing at his side and resting her right hand lightly on his left shoulder.

'You really mean that?' Captain Challoner inquired searchingly, as he turned his eyes upwards to his wife's excited face.

'Surely, I mean it. How can you put such a question? Another chance of distinguishing yourself comes to you; another, a last chance, after so many years of uncomplaining disappointment. And you can doubt my delight at the good news?'

'See, child, the station,—you can't follow me to that station.'

'It's the one station in the whole world where you will be sure of an opportunity of

showing the world, that in happier times for the navy you would have been an admiral before your fortieth year !

‘ We shall be parted for more than three full years !’ Geoffrey Challoner urged sadly.

‘ Yes, you must make up your mind to that,’ Mrs. Challoner replied lightly,—but with a tone underlying the insincere merriment of her saucy words, that revealed the effort she was making to hide the pain she would fain conceal from her husband. ‘ It will be hard on you,—cruel to you ! Poor fellow, you always felt the separations so acutely, whilst I always contrived to be happy enough without you.’

Springing to his feet and putting a strong arm round his wife’s waist, Geoffrey Challoner exclaimed, in a voice roughened and all but broken with emotion,

‘ You’re a brave soul, Netta ! Heaven knows you’re a brave soul ! Many a year has passed, since I first learned to honour you for being a brave, tender, absolutely unselfish soul !’

But enough of this on paper. Readers may be left to imagine how this husband and wife put their arms about each other, and kissed one

another on the lips, and saw love's own brightness in each other's eyes, till the tears rose and fairly blinded both of them,—and how in that moment of mutual tenderness each parted suddenly from the other, for fear of breaking down outright, and sobbing hysterically in a way that would have been weak, ludicrous, and wholly contemptible in a man much over, and a woman not so very much under, fifty years of age.

Antoinette Challoner was the quicker to recover her self-command. In a minute she was an impersonation of serenity, looking with dry eyes through one of the dining-room windows at the laurels and copper-beeches of the front garden, whilst Geoffrey went on 'pacing the deck' to and fro, over the carpet of the rather long parlour.

As soon as he was his own master again, the honest gentleman ceased to pace the deck, and observed, in something like his ordinary voice,

'Antoinette, a friend has done this thing for us.'

'I never regarded the Admiralty exactly as your enemy,—but only as your cold, unsympathetic, exacting, and ungrateful employer.'

‘We owe the Admiralty no thanks for this surprise.’

‘None,’ Antoinette responded stoutly. ‘Thanks due from us to the Admiralty?—the notion of any such thing is too absurd! The Admiralty has sent for you, because it needs the best captain of the navy to command this new ship that is being commissioned for special service. Their lordships will owe you thanks, if after their long neglect you consent to come to their assistance. What an outcry would rise from the whole country, if this new ship should come to grief through being clumsily handled. Thanks to the Admiralty, indeed! They have sent for you because they want you.’

A smile, which Mrs. Challoner observed with secret and lively disapproval, passed over her husband’s face as he replied, in explanation,

‘You fond idolater of a so-so husband, our thanks are due to the man who has moved the Admiralty in our behalf. He is the same good fellow that he was in the West Indies. I’ll write our thanks to Lord Manningtree by the next post.’

‘Lord Manningtree?—Did he tell you that he had influence at the Admiralty?’

‘He hinted no such thing.’

‘Nor talked of any of the people who do their pleasure with the King’s ships?’

‘Bless you, Netta, we never talked about those people. We talked about old friends, old times, his adventures in India.’

‘You dear, darling, far too modest husband!’ cried Antoinette Challoner, with a ring of merry laughter. ‘It is so like your modesty to be so quick to thank some one else for what you owe to nobody but yourself! Will you never value yourself at your proper worth?’

‘My dear Antoinette,’ returned Geoffrey Challoner slowly, and in a tone of remonstrance that was intended to impress his fond idolater profoundly, ‘you and I ought to be grateful to our old friend, Charley Stonnor. He has rendered me an important service with equal promptitude and delicacy. And I mean to be no less prompt in writing him my thanks.’

‘Don’t write so impulsively. On second thoughts, I can conceive that you may be right, you *are* so rarely wrong about anything. But wait a few days. It would be very awkward if by a premature outpouring of gratitude you

compelled Lord Manningtree to write you an assurance that he had not moved a finger in your interest. Do wait three days. 'Tis no long time ; and in three days you will know more about the matter.'

Geoffrey Challoner yielded to his wife's entreaty for a three days' postponement ; but in doing so he repeated his conviction that a friend had rendered him a service, and that the friend was no other person than Lord Manningtree.

During his breakfast on the second morning after this concession to his wife's counsel, Geoffrey Challoner had barely opened the last evening's London *Globe* (brought to Burnham Regis by a coach that passed through the village at 8.30 a.m.), when Mrs. Challoner paused in the act of pouring out his second cup of tea, on hearing the sound that never escaped his lips except at moments of high astonishment.

'Another surprise from the Admiralty ?' she inquired.

'No such thing ; only a confirmation of what I told you.'

'You shall have your tea, when you have told me the news.'

‘Then listen to this concise bit of fashionable gossip: “We are authorized to state that the marriage of the Marquis of Manningtree and Lady Clementina Brookfield, the third daughter of the Earl and Countess of Kidderminster, will be celebrated in London before the end of the season.”’

A smile of incredulity brightened Antoinette’s features as she requested to see the paper.

‘Unbelieving woman, read the paragraph you charge me with inventing,’ said Geoffrey Chalonier, when he had risen and laid the open paper before the tea-maker. Having returned to his seat with the replenished cup, he added, ‘Ah! you may well blush and feel humiliated.’

‘Why *are* you never wrong about anything?’ retorted the lady, folding the paper and tossing it to the lender when she had examined the announcement.

‘And now, my dear Dominatrix et Imperatrix——’

‘That’s Latin for “domineering minx,” I suppose.’

‘Have I your permission to write a congratulatory note to our whilom Charley Stonnor?’

‘Mere civility requires you to do so.’

‘And may I venture to thank him for pulling a certain string effectually? Or should I wait for a further confirmation of a *mere* suspicion? If I remember rightly, you called it a mere *and fanciful* suspicion. May I act according to my judgment on my mere and fanciful suspicion?’

‘You may write what you like; and, if you will only cease to crow over me in that ungenerous way, I’ll write a little note that may go with your letter.’

There is no need to trouble the reader with the contents of the letter and little note that went by the next post from Burnham Regis to Lord Manningtree’s London address. And of the terms in which the whilom Charley Stonnor replied to the budget from Berkshire, it is enough to say that they comprised these words:

‘As to the *Troubridge* business, you are near enough to the truth of the matter. But, indeed, my dear friends, you both make far too much of a trifling affair. I had not the slightest trouble with my future father-in-law, who knew all about you, Challoner, and says that you would have been offered another command years since,

had it not been for a notion at the Admiralty, that you were too much devoted to your great literary enterprise to be in any humour for another turn of service. Do you remember, Challoner, how you footed it by the side of my litter, as they carried me up the hills of St. Louard's? And does it live in your memory, dear Mrs. Challoner, how severely punctual you were with those doses of quinine, and how gravely you called me to order for indiscretions of which I was guilty when I was still only a weak-kneed convalescent. Since I left the West Indies, I have more than once wished I had died there. But now that I have come to dignity of which I am most undeserving, and to wealth which I am peculiarly qualified to enjoy, I take a different view of the consequences of the kindness you lavished on a certain forlorn and extremely helpless midshipman.'

From Lord Manningtree's letter, it appeared that Sir Andrew Fullalove, K.C.B., was much nearer the truth of the *Troubridge* affair than those cynical gentlemen who were so certain that Lady Kidderminster had bought the best match of the season for her third daughter with a piece of Admiralty patronage.

CHAPTER VI.

IT MAY BE FOR YEARS, OR

TWENTY-EIGHT days had barely passed since he whistled from surprise at Vivian Clampett's letter, when Geoffrey Challoner finished his preparations for another spell of service. He had gone up to London for personal conference with official personages. He had made acquaintance with some of the young men appointed to serve as officers under his command on board the *Troubridge*, and had opened friendly relations with the same young men by inviting them to little dinners. Journeying to the port, where the *Troubridge* was still in the hands of artificers busy on the ship's internal equipment, he had surveyed her lines and arrangements with a larger measure of approval than he ventured to express. Something later in the course of

his preparations, he had in the company of eminent experts and connoisseurs of ship-building taken her for a trial trip in the channel. As the trip covered three nights and four whole days, and exposed some of the experts and connoisseurs to rougher weather than they cared for, Captain Geoffrey Challoner should not be charged with precipitancy of judgment, because he thought highly of the ship on bringing her into Portsmouth harbour.

Leaving the *Troubridge* at Portsmouth under the command of his first-lieutenant, Geoffrey shook off the experts and connoisseurs, and leaped into the carriage that was awaiting his arrival and orders. By sleeping as he best might behind the heels of post-horses, he would get to Burnham Regis before his usual early breakfast, and return to Antoinette's presence without having broken into the first of the last ten days they would spend together for years—it may be for ever.

What bliss came during those ten days to the mature man and wife, for whose ludicrous delight in one another I crave Mrs. Mona Caird's tolerant consideration! Twenty-five years had

passed since they two were made one by a certain old-fashioned rite, which it is the humour of some of our social reformers to decry as a survival from mediæval barbarism, and neither of the two had ever discovered that marriage was a failure. It had never occurred to the simpletons that their union was a degrading bondage, or that they would have been happier and better people, had the barbaric rite been omitted from their arrangements.

Being thus unenlightened by philosophy and enslaved by superstition, Geoffrey and Antoinette Challoner came together on the first of 'those last ten days' with the same tender and romantic regard that had brought them face to face with one another in a country church some twenty-five years since. The glamour and delightful folly of the whole affair had preserved all their original charm. The old husband and wife were even yet young lovers, with an unwavering belief that equally benign and mysterious influences had caused their fortunes to unite in one interest. And as young lovers are strangely clever in extorting the greatest possible happiness from the propitious present, and no

less clever in closing their eyes to the austere future, Captain and Mrs. Challoner tasted in those last ten days more bliss than comes in ten whole months, or even in ten long years, to any Mr. John Humdrum and his better half.

A fine example of rectangular architecture in sound red-brick, the oblong and two-storeyed house, which they had occupied for something more than seven years at the southern end of the long village of Burnham Regis, stood within fifty yards of the high-way, leading from Abingdon to Reading and Staines. Regarded from this main road, the Laurels looked like a big house set in insufficient grounds. But on crossing the laurel-garden and passing through the mansion's ample hall into the garden on the other side of the dwelling, strangers formed a more just and agreeable opinion of the Challoners' home. Smiling just now with roses of divers kinds and every hue, the level garden afforded evidence that flowers were valued at their proper worth by the tenants of the demesne. Well away to the left appeared a wall, suggestive of a fruit-garden and forcing-houses in unseen spaces; whilst to

the right was discernible the line of murmurous limes, that fenced the mid-day sun from the bowling-green on which the vicar and Geoffrey Challoner had played many a hard-fought game. Beyond the wire-fence, that divided the garden from the paddocks, some fourteen acres of timbered grass-land rose to the highest point of the plantation that belted the miniature park. Looking from the loftiest elevation of the undulating paddocks down upon the red homestead and bright garden at their feet, and away to the umbrageous uplands on the other side of the high road, the spectator surveyed one of those restful pieces of common-place English landscape that are more apt than grander scenes to charm the beholder's fancy and reappear to his memory after long intervals of time.

Spending each forenoon of those last ten days in these scarcely remarkable grounds, now studying the aspects of their flowers, now playing with scissors and basket in the dead leaf department of horticultural industry, now sauntering in the well-kept path of the plantation that belted the paddocks, now resting on the bench

under the limes till the music of the multitudinous bees disposed them to fall asleep, Geoffrey and Antoinette Challoner found the hours between breakfast and luncheon all too few and brief. In the afternoon it was Captain Challoner's daily use to recline in an open phaeton, whilst Mrs. Challoner—the skillful whip of a large, high-bred pony—drove him hither and thither to pay P.P.C. visits to his numerous neighbours, whose invitations to farewell dinners he had declined for the sufficient and frankly stated reason that he and Netta wished to pass their few remaining evenings with one another and no one else.

How fast the sweet time flew, till it came to an end on a certain balmy forenoon. At an earlier hour of that forenoon, no intelligent traveller could have journeyed the whole length of the chief thoroughfare of Burnham Regis, from its northern end to its southern extremity, without observing that something unusual was on the point of taking place. In the more ancient parts of the long street, where the houses stood closely together, and in some cases leaned upon one another with the air of

houses no longer able to stand by themselves, most of the shops were closed to customers at a time of day when village trade is usually least lethargic.

The doors of some of these shops displayed placards announcing that the absent tradesmen would be 'Back in half-an-hour;' 'Would open shortly, as usual;' or was 'Off to the "Farewell."' The few shops that remained open were in the custody of big dogs and ungenerously-treated apprentices. On both its sides, alike in the older parts where houses were saving one another from toppling down, and in the younger parts where the 'independent' or distinctly well-to-do villagers had their places of abode, the tortuous highway seemed almost deserted, till at yet another turn of the serpentine thoroughfare the eye caught a view of the crowd that had gathered in front of the Laurels.

Captain Challoner's 'own carriage,' one of the obsolete vehicles known to our grandfathers by the name of 'britskas,' was drawn up before the closed gates of the house that would soon cease to be the captain's home. Standing on the ground, between the gates

and the carriage, could be descried Mrs. Chaloner's three women-servants, wearing white aprons over their light print dresses, and be-capped in a fashion that would be decried as ludicrous and unendurable by the house-maids and parlour-maids of the present generation. What with artisans and tradespeople of the village, a considerable proportion of the Burnham Regis farmers, women with babes in their arms, and women unencumbered with those hindrances to enjoyment, boys 'at liberty to see the captain off,' and girls of all ages, the crowd before the house and about Tommy Mavor's best posters numbered some five hundred persons, all biding their time to shout their loudest in the captain's honour. Further away could be seen a smaller and more polite assemblage, consisting chiefly of ladies in open carriages and equestrians of both sexes, who had taken up a position on a piece of way-side grass, where their horses would not be frightened by any excesses of enthusiasm in which the populace might indulge.

Whilst the hum of the larger assemblage grew louder and more loud, till it resembled the noise of a crowded 'gallery' impatient for the cur-

tain to rise, Captain and Mrs. Challoner were slowly descending from the highest ground of the paddocks, to which they had mounted for yet another view of a place that was dear to both of them.

Walking by the side of his wife, an inch or two his superior in stature, and walking on ground somewhat lower than the turf under her feet, Geoffrey Challoner appeared to disadvantage. Even so, he was of an agreeable presence, as he moved with leisurely paces down the paddocks, glancing by turns at the familiar landscape and the face of the lady with whom he was conversing. Holding his beaver in his hand, though the sun played hotly about him, he displayed all the crisp curls of his thick auburn hair,—still dark hair, though it displayed many a white thread on the crown, and had been more than slightly powdered by time over and about the temples of a round head. Every inch a sailor, though his present costume of a blue frock-coat, blue-and-white check tie (drawn twice about the neck), nankeen waistcoat, and ‘continuations’ of spotless ‘white duck’ would have beseeemed a country gentle-

man of King William's time, in such a scene and season, Geoffrey Challoner was distinctly wanting in some of the facial endowments that must be found in combination before people are justified in calling a man 'handsome.' Unfortunate in a nose, too broad at the bridge and slightly tilted at the tip, and in the roundness of his rather ruddy cheeks, Captain Challoner was less unfortunate in the lower contours of his face, that were significant of intellectual refinement and masculine force. He was nothing less than one of fortune's favourites in respect to the violet-blue eyes, that from time to time glowed from beneath his dark eyebrows.

Just the man to pass unobserved in a public throng, Geoffrey Challoner, in his silent mood, was just the man to escape notice in a drawing-room or at a dinner-table ; and even when they had fallen under the influence of his wonderful eyes, or the bell-like tones of his fine voice, his new acquaintances were more suspicious of his temper than his sincerity, which no one ever questioned. On hearing him commended for benevolence and singular amiability, a shrewd observer of human nature was heard to exclaim,

‘Singular amiability? Impossible! Tell me that he is a plucky fellow, who would be a stout comrade in a hard fight, and I’ll believe you. But don’t ask me to credit him with amiability. Possibly, he has half-a-dozen different tempers. Every man has two—his fair temper and his rough temper. But I am strangely mistaken if Captain Challoner hasn’t amongst his several tempers one that came to him straight from the devil.’

This shrewd observer of human nature was right. Though few of his friends knew it,—though Antoinette Challoner only suspected it,—Geoffrey Challoner had a temper that came to him straight from the devil. But Geoffrey Challoner had fought this evil temper, and so far got the mastery of it that he was in small peril of suffering again from its malignity as he had suffered from it years syne.

Square and broad in the shoulders, Captain Challoner was wider across the breast than most athletic men of his moderate stature; and as a bullet-headed, broad-breasted, broad-shouldered, chumpy, middle-aged gentleman is usually large in the girth, fleshy in the limbs,

and more or less slow and awkward in gait, it is well to remark that in each of these three last-named respects the captain of H.M.S. *Troubridge* differed from the majority of short and broad-shouldered men. Below the shoulders and breast there was nothing conspicuously broad about him. Small in the waist, and standing erect on small agile feet that had never known a twinge of gout, he had the figure of a cricketer, and could leap any five-barred gate in Burnham Regis. Just as the judge of horse-flesh can see how an animal will gallop from its action in the 'walk past,' the connoisseur of human 'action' could have detected rare pedestrian ability in the lightness and ease of the paces with which Geoffrey Challoner sauntered by his wife's side.

The same connoisseur would have found much to approve in the personal show and carriage of the gentlewoman, whose steps would have been less slow and short had she not desired to prolong this 'last walk round the gardens' to the latest possible moment.

Were it not my good fortune in this year of grace to enjoy the friendship of a very beautiful

woman, who even yet is sometimes mistaken for a belle of thirty summers, though her eldest grandchildren are of marriageable age, I should not hesitate to say that, in the summer of 1835, Antoinette Challoner was the youngest-looking-woman for her age ever seen in this climate, so peculiarly favourable to feminine beauty. Mindful of my friend with marriageable grandchildren and undiminished personal charms, I will be content to say that, at the close of her forty-eighth year, and even in the sunlight of this present chapter, Mrs. Challoner might have been taken for little more than half her age, and that it was difficult to conceive her to have ever been more charming to beholders. Had her face been plain, she would have been admired for the elegance of her figure and the dignity of her mien ; but, instead of being deficient in attractiveness, her face was generally regarded as even more pleasing than her form and carriage. Chiefly remarkable for the nervous lips of a rather ample mouth, and the winning trustfulness of a pair of large grey eyes, it was one of those sincere, gentle, and emotional faces that are so powerful to win admiration without seeking it.

More than once during their last walk round the grounds, Geoffrey Challoner saw the light of a painless blush brighten and pass from her fair face; and he was the better able to observe the vermeil colour appear and vanish, because she had come hatless into the garden, with no other defence against the morning-sun than a large parasol. Probably Mrs. Challoner had left her garden-hat indoors in order that *he* might have the pleasure of seeing yet a little longer her superabundance of light brown hair that, in accordance with a fashion of the period, had been drawn into one huge coil at the back of her head, and then made into the big ball, which a high tortoise-shell comb held tight and fast in the proper place,—a style of coiffure that may be commended for its neatness and simplicity, and also for displaying the delicate backward contours of a graceful neck.

‘There’s the bowling-green, on which I have played for the last time,’ said Geoffrey Challoner, staying his steps as he regarded affectionately the ground on which he had played so many ‘a near game’ with the vicar.

‘For the vicar’s sake, I hope Mr. Anderson

may like the game,' remarked Antoinette. 'The game, I think, is played in Australia.'

'And there are the limes. The bees will be humming in the blossoms next year, though I shan't hear them. What a happy seven years, Netta, we have had in this place.'

'Very happy years! May we be as happy in our next home. I wish we could have bought this place, and made it our home for the rest of our days.'

'I was on the point of making Mr. Anderson a good offer, but when the rich Australian told me, that all through his colonial life he had looked longingly to the time when he should return to the home of his boyhood, I saw it would be useless to propose buying the place. Moreover, I should have felt it almost wicked to say a word to divert him from his purpose. So you must leave the Laurels by next Easter, and look out for another nest.'

'And, so long as it is something nearer London, you don't care where the next home may be?'

'Only let it be in another neighbourhood (for I couldn't dwell hereabouts without coveting my neighbour's house), and in scenery that

won't remind me of this place. Please yourself, Netta, and you will please me. Only we must be nearer London. There, give me one more flower—one last flower—that opening rose-bud, the red one. We may not loiter any longer.'

Snipping the stalk of the flower with a pair of small scissors, which she took from her girdle, Antoinette Challoner also snipped the stalk of a pale yellow rose-bud, and, putting the two together, fixed them with a pin in a button-hole of her husband's coat.

Three minutes later, the two bosom-friends had passed round the house, and were standing in the shade of the front garden, where they caught the hum of the expectant throng on the other side of the high wall.

'There must be a lot of people there,' said Geoffrey Challoner, with a look of astonishment. 'Do you know anything of this? Did you expect this?'

'No, Geoffrey,' replied Mrs. Challoner, a blush of surprise and delight flitting over her face. 'But, of course, they are people from the village, who have come to "bid you good-bye."'

'Tis just like them. They are such good, simple, hearty people !'

'Then, we'll say farewell here. Now, Netta, for my last injunction.'

'Yes, yes,—let me have it,' ejaculated Antoinette Challoner eagerly. 'I thought you had said everything.'

'Tisn't much more I have to say. 'Tis only this,—write early and write often.'

'Foolish fellow!' returned Antoinette Challoner, smiling gaily. 'As though I needed that order!'

Making two paces, so that he stood directly in front of her, Geoffrey Challoner looked into Netta's large grey eyes, as he said, with much earnestness, albeit in the lowest tone of his clear, bell-like voice,

'I shall hunger and thirst for your letters.'

'Yes, yes.'

'I shall hunger and thirst for your letters,' he repeated, before adding, 'and, oh! I shall so delight in them, for I know they will bring me glad tidings.'

A slight shock from an electric battery would not have startled Antoinette more sharply than the last eight words.

‘You do not say so only to please me, and cheer me? Of course, you mean what you say,’ she ejaculated quickly, blushing scarlet from the joy that flashed from her eyes and gave indescribable animation to her excited face.

‘Of course, I mean what I say!’ Captain Challoner replied gravely. ‘I never say more than I mean ;—I could not trifle with you on so sacred a subject.’

‘Go, go now ; don’t stay one instant longer,’ prayed Antoinette Challoner, her right hand waving him off with a quick, nervous, passionate movement that accorded with the intensity of her agitation. ‘If you kiss me again, if you speak one more word to me, if you touch me—you will make me cry. Go, go, dear love, dear, dear Geoffrey, now that you have steeped me with delight. I can bear no more happiness. Go, go, husband—do as I bid you.’

Seeing he had better obey her, seeing that another word or look from him would put the one drop too much to her brimming cup of happiness, Geoffrey Challoner turned from her quickly, went with three quick steps to the wicket-gate, opened it, passed through it, closed

it behind him, and leaped into his carriage,—as the noisy hum of the villagers rose into one universal clamor that was speedily followed by universal silence.

Standing on the step where he had left her, Antoinette Challoner heard the clamor that greeted her husband on his appearance, felt the startling stillness by which the cordial acclamations were succeeded, and then heard every syllable of the simple and unfaltering words that expressed his gratification at the good feeling shown him so unexpectedly by the people of Burnham Regis.

CHAPTER VII.

OFF TO SEA.

HERE are the simple and unfaltering words that came from Geoffrey Challoner's warm heart and strong voice, as he stood in his carriage amidst the crowd of villagers.

‘This is kind and neighbourly. After living seven years amongst you, I ought not to be surprised at any show of good feeling in the Burnham Regis people. But this display of goodwill has taken me by surprise. So much the better for all of us ;—for *me*, because I am spared the trouble of making the longer speech, which I should have put together had I risen this morning from my bed with a knowledge of your purpose ; and for *you*, because you'll return something sooner to your work and various places of business, which you have left—some

of you, perhaps, at considerable inconvenience and even loss to yourselves—in order to wish me “God speed.” Of course, you’ll be cheering me as I drive off,—cheering me, as though I deserved it. I don’t ask you to hold your peace. To my ear there’s no more pleasant music than the cheering of big-throated Englishmen ; and, in cheering, the Berkshire boys are a match for all England. It’s by cheering that we Englishmen, when we get together in crowds, say “God bless you !” to those we care for. The curses spoken by men in their wrath are as vain as they are impious. They drop to the ground like stones, never to rise again, unless it be to rise in evidence against their utterers at the judgment. But the blessing of a hearty cheer has been known to live, and work for good long after it has been uttered. I’ll tell you a story of Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Segrave, who is still alive and prosperous (God bless him !) When he was only a young lieutenant, serving on board the *Agamemnon* under the great Nelson,—who was no great man in the time I’m thinking of, but only the simple captain of a sixty-four,—Philip Segrave had the good fortune to distin-

tinguish himself in an affair that is still talked about by the veterans who knew the *Mediterranean* in the year when Nelson lost an eye at Corsica. With a single boat, manned with fellows of the right sort, young Philip Segrave cut out two bigger boats of the enemy, and, after some hard fighting, took both of them.

“Lieutenant Segrave,” said Captain Nelson, when the youngster had got back to his ship, “you’ve come out of a gallant business that will be reported to your honour at the Admiralty, and will make the Dorset people proud of you; but you were almost foolhardy in your daring. The odds were heavy against you.” “It happened, sir, in this way,” said the boy; for, though he was a lieutenant, Philip Segrave was still a stripling; “I was counting the risks and the chances, when the cheers they gave me last time I left my father’s house in Dorchester came roaring and ringing in my ears. It was no fancy, sir. They were the very same cheers, I am sure of it,—they were the very same cheers. And, when they came roaring and ringing in my ears, my heart leaped into my throat, and the

tears came to my eyes, so as to blind me to the danger, and, before my sight was clear of the water, I and my lads were in the thick of it." Yes, my lads, it's a good story, but no cheers yet. Hold your voices a minute or two longer, and observe my orders. For, you see, you are something more than a throng, more even than a big crowd, I might almost call you a multitude; and I want to get clear of you without an injury done to man, woman, or child. Mr. Mavor's young horses are getting nervous and restive, and here I am in the midst of you. So just take my orders. You behind, hold your ground and don't follow my carriage by so much as a step. And you in front and beside me, close back on either side of the way, fall back like old soldiers, (there *are* old soldiers and volunteers amongst you,) and make a clear way for me. Don't waste your breath in running after my wheels. Keep your breath for the cheering. That's well, my lads, keep that way clear for the horses. This is the ground on which you must cheer. Mrs. Challoner is on the other side of the wall, and I want her to hear you cheer your best and loudest. But

mind, hold your cheers back till these prancing horses are well out of the crowd.'

One flash of universal silence followed the last word of Captain Challoner's timely orders. Then a noise from the roadway, which informed Antoinette Challoner that Tommy Mavor's young posters were more disposed to rear and caper than to throw themselves into their collars, followed in a minute by another noise of hoofs and wheels on the hard road, showing that the nervous horses had taken a more reasonable view of the purpose for which they had been brought out of Tommy Mavor's stables. And then the orderly riot of voices strong and voices shrill, led by Jack Dalling, carpenter, who had long held the proud post of cheer-master to the inhabitants of Burnham Regis.

It was not till they had cheered themselves hoarse and hot in the captain's honour, and then cheered themselves still hoarser and hotter in their goodwill towards the captain's lady, that the villagers went their various ways; and it was not till tranquillity had returned to the scene of recent commotion in front of the Laurels, that Mrs. Challoner's three female

servants withdrew from the highway into the garden, and found themselves within view of their mistress.

‘Well, girls, it is all over, and without an accident?’ enquired Antoinette Challoner from her seat in the hall that passed through the house, her matronly way of addressing the ‘girls,’ being the more remarkable, because the youngest of the three seemed no younger than her mistress.

‘’Twent off beautiful, m’m!’ exclaimed the parlourmaid Fanny, who in cook Rebecca’s opinion was too much given to put herself forward, and ‘talk fine, simply because she did needle-work for the missis.’ ‘’Twent off beautiful, m’m!’ the presumptuous Fanny continued, in a style that determined cook Rebecca to be more than usually short of speech, if ‘missis didn’t forthwith put that Fanny down, as missis could so well do in her own quiet way, when she had had enough of Fanny’s imperance,’ ‘so beautiful, m’m, that it was wholly a pity you didn’t allow yourself to see it. Besides the villagers and farmers and such-like at the gates, there was quite a congress of gentry on horse-

back and in carriages further up the road. There was Lady Wantage in her carriage, and Miss Antrobus, with two other ladies, in her green coach, which it was open, and both the Honourable Miss Skewballs in their fee-ayton, and Miss Tandy on her thoroughbred, and Colonel Cootes on his white-legged roan, and lots more,—to say nothing of the gentry on foot, the vicar and the Reverend Mr. Matcham, and the Miss Prices from Kingsmere. It was quite congress, m'm, of the leading families !'

'So all went right, cook?' inquired Mrs. Challoner, as she looked away from Fanny, with timely consideration of the outraged dignity of 'the head of the kitchen.'

''Twent right, m'm, all through. Why shouldn't it?' replied the short-spoken and short-tempered Rebecca.

'When the horses grew restless towards the close of your master's speech,' explained Mrs. Challoner, 'I was afraid there would be some mishap.'

'Dessay some one would have been knocked down, if people, m'm, hadn't took notice and looked sharp.'

‘They fell back and made a clear way?’

‘Course they did, m’m. The captain ordered ’em.’

‘And they fell back quickly?’

‘Lor’ m’m, how can you ask it? Course, they obeyed orders. What Burnham Regis man could stand forrard, when Captain Challoner ordered him to fall back. If the whole county had been there, the whole county would have fallen back.’

‘I shouldn’t like,’ put in housemaid Polly, a round-eyed woman, with round cheeks, and roundness conspicuous in every part of her, ‘I shouldn’t care to be in the skin of the man who didn’t do as the captain told him.’

‘Ay, Polly, you may say that!’ remarked the short-spoken Rebecca, who encouraged Polly’s talkativeness as a force that on more than one occasion had done good service in the kitchen against Fanny’s audacious loquacity.

‘I shouldn’t care,’ continued Polly, who resembled Fanny in liking the sound of her own voice, ‘to be a mutineer on board a man-of-war, and have to face the captain’s eyes, m’m, when they blazed their fiercest. That

I shouldn't, m'm. I'd rather a'most meet a ghost at midnight in a narrow lane with a deep ditch on either side, than see the master's eyes in full fury.'

'Did you ever see them in a fury?' asked Antoinette Challoner, keeping back the smile that would have caused this sensitive Polly to retire into her shell.

'Shouldn't like to, m'm,' responded Polly. 'Thank Heaven, I have never seen him in the lessest bit displeased. But when his eyes take to lighting up with blue flame, as they *do* sometimes, m'm, they make me feel, "Oh! Lord, what would happen to me, if he went angry?" Fancy those eyes glowering at you when you had made him furious angry and knowed you deserved his wrath! Bless me, m'm, 'twould be wholly terrible! One eye would blight you, and t'other eye would wither you, and the two together would consume you to tinder.—Ain't it so, m'm?'

Thus appealed to, Mrs. Challoner acknowledged with suitable gravity that in her opinion Captain Challoner's eyes would be truly terrible, if he were to go furious angry.

‘But, fortunately,’ put in Fanny, ‘the captain don’t go furious angry. He is just the sweetest-tempered master that ever were. There was nothing terrible in his eyes when he shook each of us by the hand just afore those posters left off prancing and went away at a gallop.’

‘Shook hands with each of you, did he?’ inquired Antoinette.

‘Yes, m’m, he did!’ assented the short-spoken cook.

‘That he did, and so hearty, m’m, just as though we were his own flesh and blood!’ cried round-eyed Polly.

‘And mine was the last hand the captain shook!’ asseverated Fanny, as though the *last* were necessarily the best and most distinguishing shake of the hand.

‘There, that will do for the present,’ said Antoinette Challoner, dismissing the three women with a wave of her right hand. ‘Now, girls, be off to your work; for the work of the house must be done, though the master has gone away.’

Exeunt Rebecca and Polly and Fanny, in their light print dresses, and long white aprons, and high white caps.

And now, if this book, instead of being a strictly veracious work of personal history, were what it affects to be on the title-page, I should record how, after bearing up bravely from an early hour of the morning till the departure was over, Mrs. Challoner hastened to a room where she was secure from intrusion, and there threw herself on a couch and gave vent to her feelings in convulsive sobs and many tears. But, far from behaving in accordance with the requirements of romantic art, Antoinette Challoner looked and acted as though she had no trouble on her mind. Rising from her seat in the hall, she ascended the broad staircase, and, with an air of more than ordinary contentment in her face, went to her morning-room.

Fitted on one side with well-furnished bookshelves, and on another side with high cabinets that had been constructed for security rather than ornament, this chamber was decorated on its other walls with water-colour sketches by Girtin, and some paintings by the Elder Crome, which latter works Mrs. Challoner had bought at Norwich for a few pounds, little thinking how well she was investing the money, spent

on landscapes by a provincial artist who was of small account with connoisseurs in the days of William the Fourth.

Taking from one of the cabinets a far from weighty parcel—oblong in shape, odorous of lavender, and wrapped in tissue-paper—Mrs. Challoner scrutinized with manifest approval the design and details of the needle-work, which she took from the paper and laid out upon her work-table. To a masculine observer the long piece of fine muslin, profusely embroidered with satin-stitch, would not have seemed to deserve the tenderness with which the lady touched it,—the almost reverential admiration with which she studied the complications of its florid tracery. There were several yards of the work, that might have been elaborated for a child's ball-dress, a gentlewoman's scarf, or an infant's baptismal robe. Had no circumstances endeared it to her heart, and even hallowed it to her fancy, Mrs. Challoner would scarcely have touched the work so fondly, examined the intricacies of its pattern so intently, and blushed with delight on discovering that even yet there were spaces of the muslin into which work

might be put. Yes, in each of those minute spaces she would put a rose-bud, with a single sprig of leaves upon its stalk. Five minutes later, Antoinette Challoner had sketched a pattern bud, and taken thread and needle from her work-box. Before the gong sounded for luncheon, the bud and sprig appeared in one of the vacant spaces, and the artist was gazing complacently at the latest fruit of her skill.

The remainder of the day was spent by Mrs. Challoner in less absorbing interests, but without any disposition to weep for her husband's departure. In the afternoon she drove her fast-stepping white pony through the lanes of High Anerley and Upper Norton, and round by Wapelow to Kingsmere Cottage, where she called on two of the ladies who had figured in the smaller assemblage of Captain Challoner's well-wishers.

'It was so good of you to walk so far this hot morning, just to cheer Geoffrey with a nod and a smile, as he drove by!' said the grateful Antoinette, who had come to the Cottage with two distinct objects,—to thank Miss Price and her sister Angela for a kindness, and to get

from them a perfect list of all the good people who had appeared in the politer gathering. For though she had seen much more of the world than most gentlewomen of her social degree, and had long survived the age at which prosperous people have usually learned to accept the civilities of their neighbours as mere matters of course, Mrs. Challoner was so touched by the morning's display of friendly feeling for her husband, as to be set on showing herself duly delighted by it. She would lose no time in telling her numerous friends amongst the villagers and her several acquaintances amongst the Burnham Regis farmers, that their cheers had stirred her heart to its depths, and during the next ten days she would call at every house that had contributed to the 'congress of gentry.'

In the evening, when she had taken her solitary dinner with a degree of enjoyment distinctly unbecoming a desolate wife, Mrs. Challoner passed the hours pleasantly enough in her lonely drawing-room, with the help of her piano and a new work of prose fiction. The novel was from the pen of Mr. Theodore Hook, whom Antoinette Challoner regarded as an

amusing writer, though greatly inferior to Captain Marryat, and not to be mentioned in the same breath with the author of the Waverley novels. In 1835, it was the lady's opinion that our literature would never boast a greater master of romance than the Wizard of the North. Possibly she modified this opinion when she had lived to delight in Dickens and weep for Colonel Newcome's death ; but to the last her fair face and large grey eyes used to glow with pleasurable emotion, when she was moved to talk of Sir Walter's masterpieces.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DAYLIGHT GHOST.

WITH neck arched and ears pricked, Antoinette Challoner's fast white pony was stepping at a speed of ten miles an hour, and pulling strongly against the lady's firm hand, when Geoffrey Challoner jumped from his carriage to the ground before the open door of the Highmore Half-way House on the London and Portsmouth highway, and gave his orders to the waiter and chambermaid who received him at the entrance of a hostelry well-known to officers of the navy, barristers on circuit, and other travellers of gentle quality.

‘Dinner in a quarter-of-an-hour, and a pint of port from bin P; and show me to a room where I can get rid of some of this dust,’ said the captain of the *Troubridge*, addressing both attendants in the same sentence.

Declining to take wine or ale, Captain Chalonier drank cold water freely at his dinner; a drink of which our grandfathers partook more largely in 'the two-bottle days' than some of their grandsons are aware. Though there was more drunkenness, it may be questioned whether there was more drinking in those days than in this virtuous era, when gentlemen, who would scorn to sit long over their wine after the withdrawal of the ladies, may, in the presence of the gentler sex, drink half-a-dozen different wines from capacious glasses without being suspected of intemperance.

In drinking like some lords, the Georgian toppers differed notably from the majority of commoners, with affairs to mind and duties to discharge to themselves and society. Though he allowed himself a full bottle, and even more, of his favourite wine on high days and holidays, the critical port-drinker of 'the two-bottle days' seldom cared much for any other wine, and at his tavern or club rarely ordered more of it than our octogenarian laureate demanded of the 'plump headwaiter of the Cock;' and sipping it slowly from a glass, little larger than a liqueur-glass of this

abstemious generation, he gained from the moderate quantum a gentle sense of exhilaration, that endured much longer than the excitement afforded by champagne taken from vessels holding more than an old-fashioned teacup. At sea Captain Challoner took his pint of wine daily, and on shore he was on ordinary days contented with a pint, *minus* the one glass that Mrs. Challoner took with undisguised enjoyment, but never exceeded. There were days when Geoffrey Challoner drank madeira, which he honoured next to port; but a wholesome and almost superstitious reverence for a familiar maxim usually preserved him from the indiscretion of drinking both wines on the same day.

Having dispatched his dinner with the least artificial but far from least delightful of beverages, and taken half-a-dozen of the strawberries offered to him by way of dessert, the sailor dismissed the fruit from his palate by a final draught of water, and then waited for five minutes before he touched the small but imperially honest cellar-bottle that had been brought from bin P. and put on a silver cradle at a convenient distance from his hand. The port-drinker of olden time

was above all things deliberate in his dealings with his beloved wine. It was not till he had raised it to the right point of view, and enjoyed its colour in the full light of the open window of his private room, that Captain Challoner regaled himself with the *bouquet* of the generous vintage; and it was not till he had ejaculated an emphatic ‘Ah!’ in approval of the aroma, that he raised the first glass to his lips. ‘It is perfect!’ said the connoisseur of the wine, when he had taken a third of the glassful into his mouth, and had allowed it to go on its beneficent way.

Geoffrey Challoner had drunk the glass to its last drop, and two more glasses in the same thankful spirit, when he received a visit from Mr. Tillet, the worthy host of the Half-Way House, that was not singular amongst provincial hostelryes in the old posting-days in offering good wine to all customers, and preserving a few lots of superlatively good wine for travellers worthy of especial honour.

‘Ah! landlord, glad to see you,’ said Geoffrey Challoner, in welcome to the visitor. ‘Bring another glass from the side-board, and see how this wine has improved!’

‘Thank you, captain, for the honour of being asked,’ replied worthy Mr. Tillet, with a smile brightening every feature of his broad, honest face; ‘but, as I said yesterday to Admiral Holt-ham, who likewise honoured me even as you, captain, “I could not take a drop without feeling ashamed of myself.” If ’twere mere ordinary good wine, I would take a glass and say, “Thanks, your honour, and you do me proud!” The simple fact is, Captain Challoner,’ Mr. Tillet explained, with increasing gravity, ‘that wine is too good to give away. Gentlemen who pay for that wine should drink it their selves, every drop of it. As for your honour’s health, I’ll drink to that before I go to bed. But I can’t trouble my conscience by taking a drop of that wine.’

‘Perhaps you’re right. Anyhow, an easy conscience is worth more than a glass of wine. But don’t go away because you won’t drink. I want to hear the news of the road. Who has been up and who has been down lately? And how has trade been going this year at the Half-Way House?’

After hearing all that Mr. Tillet could re-

member or cared to communicate about recent matters of the road, Geoffrey Challoner turned the post-master's talk in another direction by remarking,

‘You are a young-looking man for your age, Tillet. You were landlord here before I went for my first cruise.’

‘Ay, and before your brother, the serjeant, rode his first circuit. I came here young, or I shouldn't be able to say that. Yes, sir, two years more, and I shall be rising seventy; and yet I shouldn't fear to show against some who are twenty years younger. I can ride to hounds still, and on lucky days see all the sport, though of course I have to pick my ground and follow where I used to lead. I am young for my years, captain, as you say, sir; though how 'tis so I should be puzzled to say, unless 'tis that I have an easy temper and a good wife, and am a sparing consumer of what I sell. And that's more than I should care to say in the hearing of all Highmore. No, no, your honour, 'twould just never do to admit as much to the whole world: for a publican preaching temperance is only a fool telling his neighbours how

to work his ruin. But as for life,' continued Mr. Tillet, 'who knows how long life will last? The halest to look at are sometimes the quickest to go. Who'd have thought of your honour's brother being snuffed out as he was, just like the wick of a candle? Lor', what a gentleman he was, and with what a power of talk in him! I have heard him in court, going it to a jury till he made 'em roar with laughter, and even the very judge seemed ready to bust, and then a few hours arterwards just going it 'tother way to another jury, till there wasn't a dry eye in the whole lot of 'em! And I have seen him walking about that garden of mine with half-a-dozen counsellors, a-screaming till they choked at his mad stories.'

'Ay, poor fellow,' said Geoffrey Challoner tenderly and sadly, 'he could make people gay or grave at his pleasure.'

'Never heard such a talker, nor never shall. And he was a right good friend to the Half-Way House. 'Twas he as made it the fashion of counsellors to arrange their journeys so as to pass a night in the house, and to come down

here, in what their honours call their long vacation, to fish i' th' Bream. There's two of the serjeant's old friends have come here, staying ten days or a fortnight at a time, every autumn since he died; and they never come and go without passing a word with me about the serjeant and his quips and pranks.'

'Who are they?'

'Mr. Counsellor Hornithwayte, your honour, and Mr. Counsellor Bulteel, or rather Mr. Serjeant Bulteel, for he took the black spot only last year. They've both told me, your honour, that if he had only lived a little longer, and hadn't died when he did, your honour's brother would have been a judge and the very best judge of the bench.'

'Ay, and so he would have been. But what's the good of saying so? The dear fellow is gone.'

'And he died, sir, when you was out o' th' country?'

'Yes, I was at sea. I was on the point of coming home when he died. Had he lived a few months longer—had he only—— But then God willed it otherwise, and God's will be done!'

‘How different two brothers may be,’ rejoined Mr. Tillet, in a voice that was intended to lure Geoffrey Challoner from resting on the gloomier aspects of a doleful business. ‘Though you’ve a voice that can make itself heard, I don’t doubt, when the sea is rough and the wind noisy, your honour is a silent sort in comparison with the serjeant. And looking at you and then at him, no stranger would have ever suspected you were brothers. The serjeant was more than half-a-foot better than your honour in height.’

‘Tillet,’ ejaculated Geoffrey Challoner with emotion, ‘he had the advantage of me all round!’

‘Maybe, maybe he was all that,’ assented the host of the Half-Way House. ‘And you may say it without blushing, your honour; for a man might be made to follow the serjeant, and yet to go well afore ordinary men. And how’s the serjeant’s lady, Captain Challoner, and little miss, the serjeant’s daughter, who, of course, is a woman grown herself by this time, and mayhap the mother of children. Madam and her little daughter came here i’ th’ old time more than

once with the serjeant. Are they lively and doing well, your honour?’

Finding himself face to face with a question to which he could not have replied without embarrassment, Geoffrey Challoner avoided it by taking a gold snuff-box from the breast-pocket of his blue frock, and refreshing himself with a full pinch of Prince’s mixture. The pinch having the desired effect on nerves that had not been deadened by excessive use of the moist powder, the captain could affect to have forgotten the inconvenient inquiry in the enjoyment of his sneeze.

‘When I have given my undivided attention to what remains of my pint of superlative wine, Mr. Tillet,’ said Geoffrey Challoner, giving his companion a delicate hint that he was at liberty to retire, ‘I shall take a turn round the garden, and if I find a ripe pear on the old tree facing the south, I shall pluck it. So, if you think I shall find one, you may as well tell Mrs. Tillet to charge me for it in my bill.’

‘Charge you for it, Captain Challoner?’ replied the host of the Half-Way House, backing towards the door in obedience to the delicate

hint. ‘No, no; hardly so, Captain Challoner! To every ripe pear on the wall your honour is hearty welcome. And, though it is still early for those early pears, I rather think your honour will find one of them ready for you; for ’tis an early season, and it has been that hot to-day; and this very morning, when I took a look at the wall, I saw two or three of those early pears mellowing up to juice and flavour. They are a sort that ripen quick and go off quicker. It seems only yesterday that Serjeant Challoner (in his early time, your honour, when he was only Mr. Counsellor Challoner,) said to me, “Mr. Tillet,” says he, “those pears are in their perfection for only seven hours, and he is a fortunate man who plucks a fine ’un in the middle hour.” How that saying has stuck by me.’

Acting on his resolve, when he had sipped his port to the last drop, and tickled his unsymmetrical nose with another pinch from the gold snuff-box, Geoffrey Challoner found his way into the garden, redolent with the perfume of roses, and wall-flowers, and gaudy carnations, and musical with the hum of multitudinous bees, and the cooing notes and fluttering wings of

countless pigeons. In due course, the sailor took up a position in front of Mr. Tillet's famous pear-tree, and there, as he stood on the gravel walk immediately in front of the tree, Captain Challoner experienced an illusion that should be considered by the gentlemen who give their attention to questions of psychical research.

The captain was in the act of putting his left hand behind one of the nets that guarded the tree from the birds, in order to pluck one of the pears, which had seemed in the morning to be mellowing up to juice and flavour, when he drew his hand back from the net as quickly as though it had been stung by a wasp. At the same moment, Captain Challoner raised himself to the full height of his not commanding stature, and, turning from the wall, looked straight up the gravel-path towards the west with a strangely penetrating expression in his big violet-blue eyes. Looking thus intently at something that was visible only to himself, he moved his head slightly backwards, as though his gaze were slowly travelling up a figure somewhat taller than himself. Then his head returned to its former position, and his eyes, still preserving the

same look of searching inquisitiveness, resumed their earlier line of vision. Whilst he persisted for a full minute in this straightforward scrutiny of the non-apparent something, no change was discernible in the colour of Geoffrey Challoner's countenance, whose complexion had been brightened by the wine from bin P. to something more than its customary ruddiness. Curiosity and excitement were apparent in the firm face, so eloquent of amazement unqualified by alarm.

It was not till the object of his curiosity had disappeared before the gaze which ascertained its unreality, that Geoffrey Challoner said to himself: 'How passing strange! A wraith in broad daylight! Who ever looked on such an apparition by the full light of a scorching sun? Yet it was he and no other, standing there in all the height of six feet and an inch, towering over me with his old majestic presence, his handsome face covering me with its tender regard—in every particular the same man who stood beside me twenty years since, in this garden and at this very spot.'

Though Geoffrey Challoner had not on this particular day exceeded the modicum of wine

which he had on countless former days taken without any similar inconvenience, readers would be rash to aver that the superlative port of bin P. was in no degree accountable for the late Serjeant Challoner's apparition in front of the pear-tree. Let it be assumed that the wine was so far operative in this strange business, that, had it not been affected by the generous drink, Captain Challoner's excited fancy would not have created the vision which played with his sight and feelings for some sixty seconds. Let it also be assumed that divers other circumstances—such as the mental agitation attending his departure from home, the fierceness of the sun under whose rays he had travelled from Burnham Regis to Highmore, the recollections awakened by Mr. Tillet's gossip about Counselor Challoner, the perfume of the flowers, the noise of the restless pigeons, the drowsy music of the long row of beehives, and the other manifold influences of the pleasant garden which the brothers had often visited together—were also contributory to the nervous condition that resulted in the sailor's momentary hallucination.

One consequence of the ghostly affair was

that, having been startled into forgetfulness of the purpose that brought him to the pear-tree, Captain Challoner resumed his seaward journey without having plucked the fruit which was on the point of coming to his hand, when he was interrupted by his brother's apparition. Another consequence of the affair was that, instead of returning to the perusal of the current number of the *Quarterly Review*, which had engaged much of his attention during the earlier half of the journey, Geoffrey Challoner, on his road from the Half-Way House to Portsmouth, thought only of his brother Lemuel, and of matters relating to the whilom serjeant-at-law. And as the sun declined to the west, and the golden splendour of the cloudless afternoon died slowly into twilight, it was with equal tenderness and sadness that the living brother thought of the brother over whose grave sixteen years had passed.

Reverting to the far distant time, when as a ten-year old child he began to regard his big brother Lemuel less as a brother than as a father, Geoffrey Challoner remembered the services of affection that were rendered to him throughout

a long series of years by the brother, who stood to him for so long a period in an almost paternal relation. Recalling, on his way through a country steeped in the golden light of the declining sun, all the tender circumstances of his sweetly harmonious intercourse with Lemuel, he remembered how far dearer they had been to one another than brothers usually are,—how much more dear to each other even than *orphan* brothers usually are, because they had no other near kindred! With sorrow at his heart and gloom upon his brow, as the golden glory faded into twilight, Geoffrey Challoner pondered also on all the stern and hideous details of the subsequent discord,—the one long, bitter, unnatural quarrel that, according to the sailor's erroneous view of the doleful case, would never have disordered his life and poisoned his heart, had not his sister-in-law been an unspeakably selfish, malicious, and cruel woman.

CHAPTER IX.

PAST AND PRESENT.

It was remarked by the people of Burnham Regis how cheerfully Mrs. Challoner of the Laurels took her husband's departure for sea. Had she not enjoyed a reputation for wifely devotion, and in every other respect stood high in the opinion of her neighbours, social sentiment would have accused the lady of accepting her lot with unseemly contentment.

Rising at dawn with the birds, she every day spent an hour before breakfast in working on her embroidery, until the muslin offered no space for additional embellishment. After breakfast she passed the forenoon in tending her flowers, feeding her birds, pampering her pony with lumps of sugar, fondling her cats, gossiping with her servants, receiving her poor pen-

sioners, and sauntering in the belt of plantations. At luncheon she read the letters brought to her, from some of her numerous correspondents in different parts of the world. Later in the day, when she had looked at her newspaper and answered any of the day's letters that demanded prompt reply, she drove about the neighbourhood in the discharge of neighbourly duties,—sometimes driving to lawn-parties, where people played 'Les Graces' with tapering sticks and tiny hoops, instead of croquet and lawn-tennis. On her way to or fro the dwellings of her gentle acquaintances, Mrs. Challoner often drew rein at the gates of cottagers, to cheer bed-ridden paupers with kindly words and gifts.

Paying many visits, she received many visitors. Far from avoiding society, she courted it. Sending out invitations for ceremonious garden-parties, she entertained her most intimate friends with little dinners for small parties of six or seven persons. But in the evenings she seldom had any companion. And these solitary evenings passed pleasantly to the lady, who delighted in music and books, and was in the habit of writing long letters. The solitude

of a gentlewoman with so many sources of diversion was the reverse of irksome. It was not for her to be despondent in her husband's absence, when she was sustained by a delightful confidence that in the next February she would enjoy the felicity for which she had yearned throughout so many years.

Several weeks had passed thus pleasantly to Geoffrey Challoner's wife, and the greenness of the woods about Burnham Regis had begun to show signs of the approaching 'fall,' when she found on her luncheon-table a solitary letter, addressed to her in feminine writing of an unfamiliar hand, and sealed with black wax, bearing a not familiar device. On opening a letter by a hand whose writing she failed to recognize, it was usual for Antoinette Challoner to look to the signature before reading the first lines of the epistle. She did so on the present occasion. 'Clemaine Donaldson?' the addressee of the letter remarked to herself, as she scrutinised the signature, 'I know no Donaldson.' Ten seconds later, as a bright blush leaped to her face, she ejaculated with excitement, 'But Clemaine? It cannot be. It is!'

Yes, the christian name was familiar to Antoinette Challoner, who knew of only one Clemaine. It was the name of the child, girl, woman, of whom Antoinette Challoner often thought, though twenty years had passed since she last looked on her. It was the name of a person, to whom Antoinette conceived herself to have done a grievous wrong—a person, therefore, of whom the finely conscientious Antoinette never thought without pain.

This is the letter which Antoinette Challoner first devoured eagerly, and then re-perused thoughtfully—once, twice, and again for a third time.

‘ Raleigh Lodge,
‘ 12, North Bank Road,
‘ Regent’s Park, London.

‘ DEAR AUNT CHALLONER,

‘ If you are unaware of my marriage, the surname of my signature will possibly cause you perplexity; and perhaps you will have to think twice before remembering the child Clemaine whom you have not seen for more than twenty years. My mother told me that you saw me for the last time when I was eight years old, and was running wildly about Queen’s Square garden.

‘ Though this letter is written for my uncle’s consideration no less than for your own, I address myself

to you because you are a woman, and, as soon as my dear friend, Emmelina Harford, shall have started for India, I shall need a woman's counsel and encouragement, even more than I shall need the pecuniary assistance which I venture to hope my uncle will afford me. I do not write to you without difficulty, and possibly my embarrassment would be greater if I were precisely acquainted with the circumstances that resulted in the estrangement of my uncle and my dear father. At the time of my dear father's death, I was too young to have learnt anything of those circumstances, and in later time they were matters about which my ever dear mother declined to speak freely, though I pressed her to tell me all about them. Indeed, all my knowledge of them came to me from a few words, spoken to me by my mother in the last year of her life, when she knew she had not long to live: "Should it ever be your good fortune to be invited to your Aunt Antoinette's side, go to her with perfect confidence in her goodness. There was a time when I undervalued her, and thought myself qualified to give her advice on a subject on which I ought to have been silent; but long since I saw my mistake, and repented it bitterly. She and I had a misunderstanding that occasioned a difference between our husbands, and when they differed the whole affair passed out of the hands of us women. The first fault was mine. It was less a fault of heart than of judgment. If she was too impulsive and severe in her displeasure with me, she had cause for resentment, and was sadly out of health at the time. If I could say more in excuse of my error I should say it. It is better that you should be told no more. I tell you so much, because I would

save you from thinking ill of her. Should you ever find yourself in trouble from which you cannot extricate yourself without the help of a good woman, seek the aid of your aunt." I have copied these words from an old note-book, into which I wrote them on the evening they came to me from my mother's lips.

'My mother used to speak of the family rupture, for which she thought herself chiefly accountable, as the first of her great misfortunes, and as the turning-point at which her hitherto prosperous life passed from happiness to trouble. She had reason to say so. The estrangement, which affected my father grievously, was followed at a short interval by the death of my eldest brother by a gun accident. That calamity was succeeded by my father's failure in a contested election, which cost him six thousand pounds. Then came my dear father's death. Two years later came my grandfather Fisher's death and the downfall of "Fisher and Benbow of Mark Lane,"—the commercial house in which both of my mother's brothers were their father's partners. Of course, my uncles Fisher had known for years of the insecurity of the firm, for whose losses they were even more accountable than my grandfather who, in his old age, acted more and more on their counsel. But neither from her father nor from her brothers did my mother receive any intimation of their reverses. Continuing to receive from her father the allowance which my grandfather had made her from the time of her marriage, she remained under the impression that at his death she would succeed to a third of the very large fortune which she imagined him to have amassed. Before her marriage,—Sir Frederick Fisher who was then a rich

man, though less wealthy than he subsequently became—offered to settle fifteen thousand pounds upon her or to leave her his eventual estate in equal shares to her and brothers, if she would forego the immediate settlement of a considerable sum, and be content during his life with an unsecured allowance of six hundred pounds a-year. My father and mother chose the offer that promised the larger fortune in the long run. It was an unfortunate choice; for at his death all the residue of my grandfather's wealth passed to the creditors of the unfortunate firm. As the partners in "Fisher and Benbow" had acted with proper regard for the rules of commercial honesty, there was no disposition in the creditors to deal harshly with them. The scandal of public bankruptcy was avoided; but the assets of the firm were insufficient for the full payment of the creditors. As only a few years have passed since my uncles, Frederick Fisher and John Fisher, completed the full payment of the claims on the firm, and are now struggling in their old age to provide for their own large families, I could not ask help from them.

'After she fell into very straitened circumstances, my mother endured yet another calamity in the death of her second son, Frederick Geoffrey, who was on the point of going in for his last examination at Cambridge, when he was taken from us by a short illness. My dear mother! what a series of calamities was she called upon to endure within a few years! She was still only fifty years of age when she had lost her husband and two sons, and fallen from affluence to poverty. Had I known how poor she was becoming at the time of poor Fred's death, I should not have pressed her to take me to France and Italy. But to

spare my feelings she bravely hid from me the full extent of her misfortunes; and I imagined we were only comparatively poor, when we had become *very* poor. She was almost at the very end of her resources when she was taken from my arms and life's troubles.

‘Let me now speak of my own troubles,—my present troubles. After I put away mourning-dress for my mother, I was married to Luther Donaldson, a young artist, some of whose water-colour sketches you may have seen. Born in the same month of the same year, we were young on our wedding-day—still only twenty-five years old. Yet our engagement was a long one. On our marriage we came to this house, sharing it with our friends the Harfords, who will soon leave England for Calcutta. Our life here was very happy—so *very* happy—till it ended. Luther had not over-rated his ability to give me a tranquil home and all the pleasures for which I care greatly. We had not twenty pounds between us when we came to this dear place; but as he was very industrious, giving lessons in girls' schools and teaching pupils who came to the studio for instruction, so as not to be wholly dependent on the sale of his works, money never failed to come as fast as we needed it. Lodging something above our means, we dressed only up to our means, and fared below our means. Apart from the pleasures of art, he had not a single expensive taste; and my tastes were his tastes. Even if children had come to us, we should not have repented our imprudent marriage, as some of our friends called it. What with his sketches, which he sold to dealers for low prices, when he could not sell them to connoisseurs for rather better prices, and his pupils, who always

paid their fees punctually, we were getting on so well that Luther felt he might insure his life,—could insure it, that is to say, without running any risk of finding himself by-and-by unable to make the yearly payments. Only three months and a few days have passed since he went into the city about the insurance. He was on his way to the insurance office, when he slipped on a piece of orange-peel and fell to the ground, as he was crossing the carriage-way at the foot of Holborn Hill. Before he could recover his feet, one of the powerful horses of a heavily-laden dray struck him, and then the wheels . . . you see how it was! They carried him in a state of unconsciousness to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and there he died three days later, with his dear head resting on my arm,—died, dear aunt, without having recognized me since the accident. All this happened so recently, and yet I can write about it! I have lost him, but I may yet have something of his life to love. In my forlorn condition, it may seem to some people strange that I can *hope* to be a mother in the course of a few months. Without a calling wherewith to support myself in the meantime, I hope to have another life dependent on me next February. Should I desire another event? I must cherish the hope. If I lost the hope, I should die even yet of my grief for him. The dear child will be of his life. It must resemble him in some respects. It may, perhaps, have *his eyes*,—look at me with *his eyes*!

‘But before its arrival I must have a plan for maintaining myself and the life that will be from *his* life. Were it not for the child, I should at once seek a situation as a governess. I have all the need-

ful accomplishments for a governess, thanks to my dear mother! My French is good French, written with some degree of critical discernment, and spoken with Parisian accent. On that point I do not flatter myself. I have some facility with Italian and some knowledge of German. My music is not of the highest merit; but I know two eminent professors who would, I am sure, certify that I am a pianist of some ability. My voice is not strong, but it is musical, and has been well trained. My temper is not faultless, but it obeys me and is sympathetic; and I enjoy the society of girls. Of course, I have many defects of character, but they would not prevent me from being a good governess. But as a resident governess I should be separated from my child; and as a daily governess I should not earn enough money for my own wants and my child's wants. I could not endure to be separated from my child. Duties will devolve on me as a mother, and these duties I must discharge for myself. I want to be a school-mistress, —the mistress of a really good school for girls of gentle birth. But I have not the capital needful for the attainment of my ambition. Possibly fifteen hundred pounds would be sufficient, but a smaller sum would be insufficient for my purpose; and unless you and my uncle should think right to befriend me, at this crisis of my life, by lending me so large a sum of money, I fear I shall have to relinquish my scheme, for I know no one but you to whom I could with the faintest show of propriety make an appeal that even to my own judgment appears extravagant.

‘Do not think me, dear aunt, so unreasonable as to imagine that you and my uncle may do me so great a

service, whilst you know nothing of me. At present I only ask you to afford me an opportunity of making myself known to you, in order that you may judge whether I am worthy of the confidence I ask you to put in me. Whatever you may think of this letter, I beg you, dear Aunt Antoinette, to regard me as

‘Your affectionate niece, CLEMAINE DONALDSON.’

During her several deliberate re-perusals of this pathetic letter, Antoinette Challoner observed that it was none too long for its comprehensive story, that it displayed in several places the writer’s desire to defend people of whom she wrote from unjust censure, that it was agreeably free from the ordinary complaisances of solicitation, that it was animated by a spirit of courageous self-dependence,—that it was the letter of a sincere, conscientious, brave gentlewoman.

Seating herself at the writing-table of her morning-room, to which chamber she had carried the letter for re-perusal, Antoinette Challoner wrote the following letter in a clear and flowing hand, without pause of pen from the first to the last line :

‘The Laurels, Burnham Regis, Berkshire.

‘DEAR CHILD,

‘You have done well to write fully, and

your letter is none too long for its purpose; but its length is a stinging reproach to me. How wrong I have been to let things drift on, till it was necessary for you in your great grief to write at such great length.

‘Though you give me no hint that it may be especially serviceable just now, I venture to ask your acceptance of the enclosed paper. It is sent for you to spend for immediate comfort, not to save for future welfare. Whatever else I may do or leave undone, you may be sure I shall not forget to send you another slip of the same kind before next February. Dismiss all anxieties about ways and means from your mind. About them you shall have no occasion to worry. I thank you, I thank God, that you have written to me. By doing so you have made me your debtor. Do believe, dear child, that during the last twenty years or more, I have often thought tenderly of my little friend Clemaine, and that my heart has never been without a vacant chamber for her to occupy; and now, thank heaven! you have come to it through your letter, and have taken possession of it. My dear Clemaine, I may not delay to assure you that your dear mother blamed herself too much, and spoke far too generously of me. I was more at fault than she. But enough of that wretched business for the present.

‘Your plans for the future we will discuss by word of mouth. Though I admire and sympathize with your self-dependent spirit, I am not sure your scheme is the best that can be devised. Nothing can be settled till we have consulted with your uncle, who is cruising off the African coast. But, if you hold to your plan, you shall have all that may be required for its execution.

Your present duty is to be as hopeful and cheerful as possible, for the sake of the little one who will be here in February.

‘Before your letter came to my hands, I had arranged to run up to London on Wednesday for a week or ten days. Let me know if I may call on you at Raleigh Lodge at three o’clock in the afternoon of next Thursday. I am longing to see you. Dear child, I shall shed many more tears over your letter, and be all the better for shedding them. May heaven keep and bless you! Make the same prayer, dear Clemaine, for

‘Your affectionate aunt,

‘ANTOINETTE.’

Next day, on entering Mrs. Donaldson’s parlour to pay her an early visit, Emmeline Harford—a young woman with a piquant face that might with equal justice be called pretty and plain—found Clemaine in tears.

‘Clemaine, my darling,’ inquired the young woman of equivocal countenance, ‘what is the bad news? I see—a disappointing letter from Aunt Antoinette? I was afraid she would be selfish and insulting.’

‘No, no; she is neither. The news is so much too, too good, that it has upset me.’

‘If you are crying for joy, cry away, my friend. Tears of that sort will do you good. And Aunt

Antoinette is the kind aunt of the story-books, is she ?’

‘Don’t laugh, Emmeline ; there’s nothing to laugh at.’

‘So it appears,’ replied Emmeline Harford, with a renewal of kindly merriment at another flow of tears from Clemaine’s eyes.

‘Sit down there, and read that letter,’ said Clemaine, holding out her aunt’s letter towards the friend from whom she had no secrets.

‘Sunshine from Berkshire !’ remarked Emmeline, when she had read the letter and raised a pair of glistening brown eyes from the exciting epistle. ‘And very pleasant sunshine it is !’

‘Now look at the enclosure, the paper to which she refers,’ said Clemaine, displaying a crossed cheque for a hundred pounds.

‘It is a noble present,’ Emmeline Harford remarked, in a graver tone, ‘a noble gift,—but I would rather have the letter without the gift, than the gift without the letter.’

‘’Tis better to have both,—it is too, too good of her !’

‘No doubt ; but the letter is worth more than the cheque. The cheque came from a cheque-

book, but the letter comes straight from a woman's heart.'

'They both come *from* a woman's heart *to* a woman's heart,' rejoined Clemaine warmly, as she recovered the precious documents and kissed each of them.

Springing to her feet excitedly, Emmeline Harford ejaculated:

'I must go and tell Fred, before he starts for the city. Of course, I may tell him? No, I am too late, he is gone,' she added, as she caught the noise from the gate. 'What, more crying?' Mistress Emmeline continued, 'Clemaine, you must not go on in that way. You may overdo it even with tears of joy.'

Half-a-minute later, Emmeline's emotion overbore her philosophy.

'As I am not Mrs. Challoner's niece, I have no right to cry over her letter. It would,' said the humorous Emmeline, 'be sheer impertinence for me to make a fuss about it. And yet, —and yet, Clemaine, I am more than half-inclined to go on the water with you.'

The woman who is more than half-inclined to do anything, seldom goes her way without doing

it. So Emmeline's arms came about Clemaine's neck, and for two or three minutes the two friends were on the water together.

‘And now, Mistress Clemaine,’ remarked Emmeline, when she and her friend had returned to dry land, ‘you must do your duty in that position of life . . . and take your breakfast.’

‘Then don't run off with the tea-pot.’

‘You may eat that cold egg with your bread-and-butter, but you mayn't drink cold tea. I will be quick about it.’

As she kept her last word, Emmeline Harford returned from the kitchen-fire in less than due course with a fresh brew of tea for her friend's refreshment, and, when Clemaine had breakfasted, she and her companion spent a couple of hours in the leafy garden, that sloped from the southward windows of their home down to the canal, whose barges were now and then visible as they moved noiselessly under the branches of the elms.

CHAPTER X.

AUNT AND NIECE.

RALEIGH LODGE was rather a stately place for the common home of two sets of young people, whose combined incomes were less than six hundred a-year. On coming into the hands of Messrs. Mortlake and Pitcher of 34, Regent Street, Raleigh Lodge was declared in the advertisements of these well-known house-agents 'a detached family mansion, standing in its own grounds,' as though it were common for a mansion to stand in some other more or less remote premises. On alighting from her fly at the appointed 3 p.m., and entering the fore court of 12, North Bank Road, Aunt Antoinette Challoner was agreeably impressed by the house that had been for three years the home of a young married couple, who lodged rather above their means; and the aunt was no less favour-

ably affected by the parlour, of which she was the sole occupant for some three minutes, before a young woman in mourning-dress entered the room, and, with a faint indication of surprise, glanced shyly at her visitor.

Something taller than middle height, shapely in figure, and of a pleasant countenance—that, without being altogether beautiful, was full of beauty—this gentlewoman was the more agreeable to look upon because, instead of wearing a cumbrous thing of crape with long ‘weepers,’ she wore on her brown hair a dainty cap of fine white tarlatan. The kind of cap, that has for many a day been the ordinary head-dress of a young widow, was unusual half-a-century since.

‘You have come *from* my Aunt Antoinette?’ said this young widow, looking shyly and inquiringly at the caller, who had risen and advanced a step towards her.

A smile rose to Antoinette Challoner’s countenance as she caught the significance of the timid look of interrogation, and answered it with,

‘No, Clemaine, there is no mistake. I haven’t come from her—I *am* Aunt Antoinette.’

‘Of course; now that I have caught your profile, I know it from memory and the silhouette. But you *are* so young!’

‘I don’t dye, nor wear false hair, nor use artificial colour, nor “make up” in any reprehensible way,’ said Aunt Challoner gaily. ‘I am just as I ought to be,’ she added, with a girlish simplicity that was alike quaint and naïve, as she kissed her niece lightly on her eyelids and lips.

‘I know you are everything you ought to be,’ returned Clemaine, with proper cordiality. ‘But you *are* so young. I expected to find you with grey hair, and—— and you look no older than myself. You are so marvellously young.’

‘You are a perfect flatterer, Clemaine, because you clearly mean what you say. Yes, child, I “wear well,” as the homely phrase goes. And I hope you’ll find my heart no older than my looks,’ said Aunt Challoner, holding out her arms with a slight gesture that was irresistibly inviting. Accepting the invitation, Clemaine leaped into the extended arms.

At a later time of the long visit, Clemaine Donaldson introduced her aunt to Luther’s

studio, and then led her to the upper rooms, to show, with tender pride, to what a perfect nest she had been taken in her honeymoon. Amongst the ornaments of the chief bed-room, Aunt Antoinette recognised a thing of art (?) that caused her to exclaim merrily :

‘Oh, that absurd silhouette! I remember standing for it so well.’ After a brief pause, the original of the full-length portrait in black (touched with gold,) asked, in a peculiar tone of eager and jealous curiosity, ‘And has it always been there? I mean, from your first coming to this house?’

‘Yes, surely,—in what better place could it have been put?’ replied Clemaine Donaldson, with a show of perplexity at her aunt’s question. Ten seconds later, divining why the question had been put, Clemaine added, ‘I do not remember ever having had a bed-room without that silhouette on one of the walls.’

‘I am glad of that.’

‘It is a small thing, dear auut, to be glad about.’

‘The small thing shows that you never disliked me much.’

‘Dearest aunt!’ Clemaine exclaimed warmly, ‘I never disliked you in the least. You may not imagine that I ever thought of you otherwise than affectionately. No one ever said an ill thing of you in my hearing. I never heard anyone speak of you with the exception of my father and mother, and two brothers; and no one of them was likely to talk unkindly of you to me.’

‘That’s a comfort to me, and a punishment also. Dear child, what a goose I must have been when I was a young woman! What a goose to think your mother was my inferior!’

‘She was not so good-looking as you, and probably you were much the cleverer.’

‘’Tis of more moment that she surpassed me in generosity.’

‘She was a good, very good mother, Aunt Challoner, and no woman, who is that, can be much less than a good woman. In her later years she was gentler and fairer to others, and more meek-spirited than I used to think her in my childhood. Perhaps her troubles sweetened her nature. It comforts me to think that her trials improved her, and that, instead of being

real misfortunes, they were blessings in disguise.'

Changing her tone as she essayed to lead the conversation from topics to which the silhouette had somehow given rise, Clemaine glanced at the half-length portrait over the mantel-piece—a crayon-sketch of a young man with a painter's brushes and pallet in his left hand.

'He was very handsome, Clemaine,' said Antoinette Challoner in reply to the glance, 'and must have been very good.'

'It's when I think of his goodness that I suffer most.'

'Of course,—for 'tis then you see most clearly how much you have lost. By-and-by, you'll think of his goodness for the pure happiness of thinking about it.'

'You have such a sweet way of putting the right thought in the fittest words! You are such a delicate comforter!' said the young widow, with the pleading look of a child asking for a caress.

When they had descended the stairs, these two women went to the other side of the house, to pay a visit to Emmeline Harford, who was just then giving her children their early supper of

bread and milk, with a slice of cake for a *bonne bouche*.

‘I thought you would give me a look,’ remarked Emmeline, as she took Antoinette Challoner’s hand, ‘and I wanted to thank you for doing Clemaine so much good. Ten days since she was quite another creature,—just the very poorest of poor things.’

‘And I owe you thanks,’ returned Antoinette Challoner, with a delicate note of contrition in her cordial voice, ‘for having been so good to my niece when I was away from her.’

‘Pray, Mrs. Challoner, reserve your gratitude for those who are entitled to it. I haven’t been the least bit good to Clemaine, and she has not been the least bit good to me. The tie between us is the bond of mutual convenience. We came together from motives of enlightened selfishness, and we are fairly good friends, because each serves the other’s purpose. Our concern for each other is limited by economical considerations.’

‘Aunt Antoinette,’ ejaculated Mistress Clemaine Donaldson, with needless care to guard her aunt from misconception, ‘we have been

fast friends ever since we used to play together in the Queen's Square garden. She was Emmeline Monckton in those days.'

'Pretty friends! sweet playmates!' protested Mrs. Harford. 'We used to quarrel desperately, and more than once fought one another with our fists; and it was always Clemaine's fault that we fought so desperately.'

'Fought so desperately!' cried Clemaine, with a degree of animation quite unbecoming the wearer of a widow's cap. 'Now she'll be telling you, Aunt Antoinette, of what she calls our grand battle-royal.'

'Of course I shall. 'Twas when I struck out and gave her a black eye. What a business it was! Next day—I shall never forget it—I was taken in chains round the square to Mrs. Chalonier's drawing-room to receive judgment.'

'Chains of roses?' suggested Antoinette, who evidently thought Mrs. Harford an amusing young woman.

'Chains of circumstance,' replied Emmeline the outrageous. '"Chains" is only a figure of speech for being led round the square by one's governess. Miss Clipstone had me in charge,

and held my wrist the whole way. It was enough to frighten the juvenile delinquent, who had been told that it rested with Mrs. Challoner to say whether she should be whipped on returning from court to prison. When I came before the court—that's another figure of speech—the court took me on her lap, and kissed me, and, after telling me I shouldn't play riotously, sent me off with the sweetest little currant-bun conceivable, and a note for my mother, saying that I was forgiven.'

'All this about an eye that was scarcely reddened by the blow!' cried Clemaine Donaldson.

'So it all ended happily,' continued Emmeline Harford. 'I was punished with a currant-bun instead of a whipping. I was humiliated, and Clemaine recovered from her black eye; and our mothers were as good friends as ever,—which isn't usual with gentlewomen whose daughters have had a stand-up fight in a public square.'

'How old were you when this happened?' inquired Antoinette Challoner, with lively interest.

‘I was nine and Clemaine was eight, but she was a full inch the taller and much the stronger.’

‘And you can make this confession in the hearing of your own children?’ asked Antoinette Challoner, as the children roared with delight at the familiar story.

‘You naughty mamma, to fight Clemaine out o’ doors,’ cried the senior infant—a laughing girl, *ætat.* five.

‘And Clemaine’s mamma gave my mamma a currant-bun!’ roared the younger infant, Tommy, *ætat.* four, who was of opinion that the interest of the exciting story culminated in the substitution of a ‘goodie’ for a chastisement.

Having brought themselves into prominence by these judicious comments on their mamma’s narrative, Emmeline Harford’s children received kisses from Antoinette Challoner, who was still caressing the chubby infants, when the one female servant of the ‘mansion standing in its own grounds’ entered the room and spoke words to Mrs. Donaldson.

‘It’s Dr. Cartwright,’ said the last-named lady. ‘Come and see our dear doctor, Aunt Antoinette. You’ll be sure to like him.’

‘It’s Dr. Cartwright! I’ll go and see the dear doctor,’ cried each of the infants.

‘Indeed, my dear young people,’ Emmeline Harford remarked quickly, and in a tone of high maternal authority, ‘you’ll do no such thing. You run oftener than you ought into Clemaine’s parlour when she is alone. If the doctor wishes to see you, he’ll send for you.’

Returning with Clemaine to her parlour, Antoinette made the acquaintance of Arthur Cartwright, M.D., of Welbeck Street, Cavendish Square; a tall and comely gentleman, who wore the signs of middle age in his fine profile, and in the thickly-haired brows of his penetrating, but singularly agreeable eyes. A person of a cheery countenance and almost stately presence, he afforded, in his bearing and address, a good example of the manner that distinguishes the *élite* of the medical profession from the leaders of the other liberal professions. Not that he belonged to ‘the *élite* of the faculty’ in the narrowest sense of the term. Neither a member of the London College of Physicians, though he was an Edinburgh doctor of medicine, nor a ‘pure surgeon,’ though he was a member of the

college of Lincoln's Inn Fields, Dr. Cartwright was a 'family doctor,' who made in general practice a greater income than most fairly successful physicians of the higher grade of the faculty. On coming into the room, where he was waiting for her niece, Antoinette Challoner saw, almost at a glance, that this 'general practitioner' was a man of the world and of society. By the subtle freemasonry of their order gentle people are quick to recognize persons of their own social kind. Antoinette's instinct did not betray her on the present occasion. For, though he was only their 'family doctor,' Arthur Cartwright, of Welbeck Street, enjoyed the friendly regard of some of the brightest and most fastidious 'queens of society.'

'Pardon me,' said Dr. Cartwright, addressing both ladies as they approached him, 'if I have called at the wrong moment.' Bowing slightly to Antoinette Challoner, the doctor added, in an explanatory tone: 'Mrs. Donaldson is good enough to let me run in upon her whenever I pass the corner of North Bank Road.'

'Observe, Aunt Challoner,' remarked Clemaine, 'that Dr. Cartwright calls on me *only*

when he happens to be passing. When I was so ill that he paid a second visit day after day, he always happened to be passing. 'Tis his pretty way of pretending that I give him no trouble.'

'Clemaine has told me how kind you have been to her. Had I been a man I would have been a doctor!' said Antoinette Challoner, who resembled a large proportion of her sex in taking a romantic view of medicine and its followers. 'No other profession affords so many opportunities for being unobtrusively benevolent.'

'No profession, Mrs. Challoner,' returned Dr. Cartwright, 'is more apt to make a naturally vain man unendurably conceited. Because she allows me the pleasure of taking a sort of paternal interest in her health, your niece thinks of me, and sometimes even speaks to me, as though I were a prodigy of beneficence.'

It was not till she heard them talking together, as though they were old acquaintances, that Clemaine silently charged herself with having forgotten to introduce the doctor to her aunt.

'Don't you think the change of a trip to Berk-

shire would be good for my niece?' inquired Mrs. Geoffrey Challoner, at a later point of her first interview with Dr. Cartwright.

'She doesn't need any change of air,' Dr. Cartwright answered, glancing as he spoke at Clemaine, to learn from her face how she regarded her aunt's suggestion; 'but change of scene might be beneficial to her, if she could take it quietly.'

'We should be very quiet. I have a large garden in which she could pass the time by herself, and I should take her for daily drives in the lanes about Burnham Regis. Of course I should invite no one to the house, and she need not be troubled with introductions to my callers.'

'Such a visit would be good for her; but . . .'

'Oh, of course,' Antoinette Challoner put in quickly, 'it would be only for a short time, as the Harfords are so soon going to Calcutta.'

'You are a good thought-reader, Mrs. Challoner,' remarked Dr. Cartwright, with a smile. 'How did you discover all the force of my "but" so quickly?'

'It was so natural a thought for me to have. Your "but" did not put it in my mind.'

‘A very natural thought for one who is in the habit of thinking for others,’ said the doctor, observing how little was enough to make a blush flit across Mrs. Challoner’s face.

‘The atmosphere of this house is bad for me,’ Antoinette Challoner remarked gaily; ‘it is surcharged with flattery. Clemaine began by complimenting me on the youthfulness of my appearance, and now you are teaching me to think myself a very amiable woman.’

‘And isn’t she wonderfully young-looking for her years?’ Clemaine Donaldson inquired, with much animation.

‘It is impossible for me to say,’ answered the medical authority, ‘as I don’t know Mrs. Challoner’s age. It will be time enough for me to ask Mrs. Challoner to tell me her age when she has made me her medical adviser: and even then I should not venture to put so delicate a question, without due consideration of the need for putting it.’

‘How old do you think her?’

‘Well, if I may construe Mrs. Challoner’s silence as consent to your inquiry, I should say—yes, I should say that you and your aunt are

about the same age. She may, perhaps, be something older; for I know a few ladies who look no older than you, though they are over forty. I am just now attending a lady who is forty-eight, and yet might be mistaken even in such a light as this for no more than thirty. Cases of singular youthfulness of appearance are less remarkable to doctors than to other people.'

'I like to be told I look young,' said Antoinette Challoner, with naïve simplicity, 'for my husband's sake. I don't care how old I look to other people.'

'What is your exact age, aunt?'

'Forty-eight. I was forty-eight only a few weeks since. I did not keep my last birthday, because Geoffrey was at sea.'

'Now, Dr. Cartwright,' urged Clemaine Donaldson, 'isn't it a wonderful case?'

'It is certainly an unusual case,' assented the doctor, scrutinizing the gentle face of the subject under examination. 'You will pardon me, Mrs. Challoner, for examining you so closely?'

'Pray, scrutinize me,' returned Antoinette Challoner, with an air of placid amusement. 'If

I were a horse, I should ask whether you would like to look at my teeth.'

'I have examined them already,' said the medical expert, 'and, besides being beautifully white, they are remarkably short and regular for a person of your age. I am venturing to examine your eyebrows. Of course, you now and then use tweezers to them?'

'Bless me! no,' ejaculated Antoinette Challoner. 'Why should I? The hair on them is none too thick.'

'Then, do excuse me,' said Dr. Cartwright, taking from one of his waistcoat-pockets a small magnifying-glass. 'You see you lead me on from one liberty to another. May I use this glass? This *is* unusual,' remarked the doctor, with a note of enthusiasm in his voice, when he had used the glass for half-a-minute. 'Your eyebrows have not one of the tell-tale hairs.'

'I knew it was an extraordinary case!' Mrs. Donaldson put in triumphantly. 'And you don't seem to have a grey hair on your head.'

'Though I never use tweezers. And now is the examination over?'

'Accept my apologies, Mrs. Challoner, for—'

‘For doing what Clemaine asked and I allowed you to do.’

Five minutes later, when Dr. Cartwright had taken his departure, Antoinette Challoner remarked to her niece,

‘I like your doctor, Clemaine. If I am ever ill when I am in London, I shall send for him.’

CHAPTER XI.

FEELING AND CONDUCT.

DR. CARTWRIGHT having decided that a trip to Berkshire would be beneficial to his patient, the young widow journeyed from London to Burnham Regis by one of the several stage-coaches that passed daily through that long and tortuous village to the music of a guard's horn. Alighting from her coach on the first day of October, she was her aunt's guest for an entire fortnight, spending the days chiefly in the open air. It was a pleasant fortnight for both women, whose mutual regard changed in so short a time from sympathetic congeniality to strong affection. But earthly happiness is usually touched with sadness. There were moments when Clemaine charged herself with heartlessness in finding life so

enjoyable, when her husband had been so few months in the grave. And the more she delighted in her niece, the more often was Antoinette Challoner troubled by compunction for having done her kinswoman a grievous wrong. In her contrition for having caused dissension in her husband's family, the woman of a warm heart and tender conscience resolved to do her utmost to restore Clemaine to her proper place in her uncle's affection.

Together with the desire, there grew in Antoinette Challoner's breast a distrust of her ability to render Clemaine Donaldson this important service,—the service demanded of her by justice,—the service that would only undo a part of the mischief that had resulted from the outbreak of passionate feeling, of which she was guilty so many years since in Queen's Square. She had no fear that Geoffrey Challoner would disapprove her action in assuring Clemaine that she should have from her uncle all needful aid for the accomplishment of her design; for she remembered how he had declared that, should Dorothy Challoner or her children ever apply to him for material aid, he would help them with a

liberal hand. And he was no man to forget the purpose, so deliberately expressed, or to withdraw from it. Antoinette Challoner also remembered the stern voice and hard words with which he at the same time declared that his munificence to Lemuel Challoner's widow and children would be attended with no mitigation of resentment against the woman who had robbed him of his only brother.

Antoinette Challoner desired that her husband should do more for his niece than help her with money. Her strong desire and far from strong hope were that he should take Clemaine to his heart,—should on his return from sea take her and her child to live with him under his own roof, or at least near his own walls and under his immediate personal protection. Now that Dorothy Challoner was dead, would the man, who felt so deeply and steadily, be capable of loving Clemaine as he would have loved her, had she not been personally associated with the incidents that had resulted in the supreme sorrow of his existence? That he would be just and munificent with his purse to the near kinswoman, who in her tender childhood had of

course been wholly guiltless in respect to her mother's offence, Antoinette Challoner was confident. But Antoinette's heart misgave her when she asked herself, whether the man, so steady in his few enmities and many friendships,—the man, whose affections (as he had so impressively told her) were not under his control, but, on the contrary, dominated his will,—would be able to regard Dorothy Challoner's daughter with love, in no degree troubled or discoloured by his deep dislike of her mother,—the mother who was no more. A foolish woman, or merely common-place woman, would have imagined herself competent to settle this difficult question by an overbearing expression of her own wish and resolve,—by ordering her husband to love his niece heartily, because he *ought* to love her.

Antoinette Challoner was far too clever and sympathetic a woman to be capable of such a mistake. Aware that in every righteous way her husband would *act* in accordance with any strong expression she might make of her desire, she was no less aware that she could not change his feelings by a command, however

cleverly it might be draped and tricked with terms of persuasion and phrases of entreaty. The sympathetic woman, whose conduct was so often determined by feelings too powerful for her self-control, and whose feelings had always received the largest measure of consideration, needed no monitor to inform her that her husband's deepest feelings were entitled to similar respect. The question, which just now occasioned her so much uneasiness, related to feeling rather than conduct,—to certain fine sensibilities and subtle forces of her husband's nature, that were wholly outside the domain of her wifely authority, and barely within the field of her womanly influence. Unless Geoffrey Challoner could care for his niece so as to be capable of enjoying her society, Antoinette's judgment assured her it would be better that she should forego her strong desire, and that Clemaine, pursuing a self-dependent course, should make a home and career for herself at a distance from her uncle. Could he thus care for Dorothy Challoner's daughter? It was for him, and no one else, to answer the question. His wife could only influence him in the matter by writ-

ing to him of Clemaine Donaldson, so as to offer her in the most favourable light to his compassion and judgment.

Clemaine was still enjoying the quietude of the Laurels, and her daily drives in the leafy lanes of Berkshire, when Antoinette Challoner wrote to her husband a comprehensive narrative of her recent intercourse with his brother's daughter and only surviving child. Comprising exact copies of the letter in which Clemaine had applied to them for help, and of the answer made to the pathetic solicitation, the narrative displayed with equal skill and kindness all the many particulars which the writer had learned respecting Dorothy Challoner's closing years, and her daughter's career from the hour of her father's death. Speaking of Clemaine with affectionate admiration, and showing the grounds for her high opinion of the young widow, the writer of the narrative dealt with Dorothy Challoner's story in a way that was most likely to soften Geoffrey to the memory of his sister-in-law. Captain Challoner's reply to this lengthy epistle did not come to Antoinette's hands till the middle of January, when circumstances had

greatly changed Mrs. Challoner's view of her near future.

Clemaine Donaldson had scarcely returned to North Bank Road, the braver in heart and the richer in womanly fortitude for her brief sojourn at Burnham Regis, when Antoinette Challoner passed suddenly from the spiritual elation that had possessed her for several months, to a condition of anxious incertitude that seemed likely to close in yet another visitation of despondency. In her anxiety she hastened to London and consulted Dr. Cartwright, whom she enjoined to keep her arrival at a Jermyn Street lodging-house from the knowledge of their friends at Raleigh Lodge. Living in seclusion, Mrs. Challoner remained in Jermyn Street for an entire week, during which time she was visited daily by the Welbeck Street doctor, to whom she felt she could safely confide all the particulars of her equally delicate and pitiful case. A safer confidant and more judicious adviser Antoinette could not have found in the medical profession; and, though his clear and unhesitating verdict on the main questions of her case extinguished for ever her

long-cherished hope of eventually becoming a mother, the patient returned to Berkshire with a sentiment of gratitude for the physician's candour.

‘Would that I had consulted so wise and honest a physician as you at the outset of my long trouble,’ the poor lady remarked with thankfulness to the honest physician, that was touched with asperity towards an earlier adviser. ‘Had Dr. Goodeve spoken to me as you have spoken, I should have fought my grief and conquered it, and should have escaped all the misery—the untold and unutterable misery—that has come to me from the delusive hope with which he inspired me. I wonder if poor Mary Tudor was trifled with and cruelly misled by some Dr. Goodeve of the sixteenth century?’

‘You may not be too severe on Dr. Goodeve, my dear Mrs. Challoner,’ replied ‘the dear doctor’ of Raleigh Lodge, ‘you should be just to him, though he is no longer in this world to suffer from your bad opinion of him. Though he was a fine physician, he may have been mistaken about your rather obscure case. And, if he misled you wilfully, he may have done so from a good motive.’

‘How could he have had a good motive for deceiving me, if he misled me wilfully?’

‘He may,’ Dr. Cartwright answered, with impressive seriousness, ‘have thought it better for your mental health that you should be buoyed up by a delusive hope, than be altogether hopeless. You see, you are a highly nervous and sensitive woman. Your way of blushing sometimes for just nothing at all, and the peculiarity of your pulse, show how highly strung and dangerously fine your nerves are. Twenty years since Dr. Goodeve may well have questioned whether you could endure utter hopelessness, and have shrunk from the responsibility of telling you a truth that might wreck your reason. It was neither easy nor pleasant for *me* to be cruel only to be kind.’

‘You were not at all cruel, and you were *very* kind,’ Antoinette Challoner ejaculated, with vehement tenderness, ‘oh ! so very kind ! Why is the tongue so weak to declare the heart’s gratitude ?’

‘The tongue may be weak, but manner and conduct are strong. You must show your gratitude to me, my dear Mrs. Challoner, by

bearing your fate bravely, so that I may have no reason to regret what you are pleased to call my honesty.'

'Don't fear for me, dear doctor. My heart will not break, nor my brain run riot, because I know my fate. There is comfort in knowing the worst. I shall cry it all out over the red and yellow leaves in Berkshire. It will go sadly with me for a few weeks; but, when the latest leaves have fallen, I shall come up to town with a smiling face, and shall hope to see you often at Raleigh Lodge.'

'Yes, you may not go there with a sad face. For your niece's sake—for the sake of *her* hope—you must be brave, and extort contentment from your hard lot.'

'How fortunate for me,' remarked Antoinette, 'that I resisted my disposition to tell Clemaine that we were both animated by the same hope. I was so very near making the vain confession to her when she was in Berkshire.'

Knowing how keenly desirous he was of offspring, and how he was nursing in his breast the delusive hope that had perished for ever from her own heart, and how acutely he would

suffer from the disappointment of an expectation which she had fostered, it is not wonderful that Antoinette was reluctant to inflict on her husband such anguish as had come to her, and that she determined to leave him for a while in the enjoyment of the fond imagination, till she should have received his answer to her letter about Clemaine, and should see her path more clearly by the light of what would happen in February at Raleigh Lodge. Should he be capable of loving Clemaine as daughter rather than niece, he might rejoice at what would happen there some three months hence,—might rejoice at an event that would be an imperfect, but considerable, compensation for the disappointment of a nearer and dearer hope. Some three months hence! Who of us knows what will happen three months hence?

Geoffrey Challoner's reply to Antoinette's lengthy narrative was what she feared it would be. Speaking compassionately of his niece's misfortunes, and admiringly of the spirit of her letter, the captain of H.M.S. *Troubridge* declared his cordial approval of all that Antoinette had done for the consolation and encouragement of the young widow.

‘Years since I told you that neither Dorothy Challoner nor her children,’ he wrote to his wife, ‘should ever apply to me for help, and find me indisposed to assist them. In bidding Mrs. Donaldson dismiss all anxiety about pecuniary ways and means, and promising her the money needful for her enterprise, you have done no more than I should have done, had her letter been addressed to and opened by me. You are right in thinking that her purpose will require a much larger sum than she imagines. She will need at least three thousand pounds, and probably more : for she should be the mistress of a really good school. She should lay her plans deliberately, and avoid precipitancy in their execution. She should, I think, defer action till a year shall have passed after the birth of her child ; and of course we must provide liberally for her comfort, till she is in a position to provide for herself. Perhaps Bath would be the best place for her establishment. It is a great city for girls’ schools ; and, as I was her friend for many years before I acted as her executor, I know precisely the degree in which Admiral Pierson’s widow prospered as a Bath

schoolmistress. After educating her several children and establishing them honourably in life, Mrs. Pierson left them something more than thirty thousand pounds at her death. With our help Mrs. Donaldson might be no less prosperous in the same city. Some of your old Somerset friends might be moved to send her pupils, whose birth and quality would at once make her school fashionable. Anyhow, at Bath she would have the largest measure of advantage, from your sanction and my approval of her enterprise.

‘Of course, dearest Netta,’ the writer continued, ‘I at once saw the force of your suggestion that I might think right to offer Mrs. Donaldson “another way of taking life.” It was like you, my dear wife, ever considerate for the feelings of others and at all times so delicately thoughtful for *my* sensibilities, to say no more in recommendation of the “other way of taking life.” There was no need for you to say even so little, in order to show me that you would like the young widow and her child to be members of our household. For *my* sake, my darling, you must relinquish your generous

project. My knowledge of my own defects forbids me to assent to your desire. It will be better for her, *far* better for *me*, that Mrs. Donaldson should live in independence of us, and at some distance from us. Were she to live with us, or under our immediate personal protection, I should always think of her as Dorothy Fisher's daughter rather than as my dear brother's daughter, and should even think of her child as Dorothy Fisher's descendant rather than dear Lemuel's grandchild. Keep us apart, spare me the disquiet that would result from personal association, and I shall think of her as my brother's daughter rather than her mother's daughter. Compassionate me for being so illogically implacable. I do not try to justify my feeling towards the innocent offspring of the woman who did me grievous wrong. I am not master of my feelings, but it lies within my power to act with justice and humanity to my brother's child. I will aid her, correspond with her, sometimes visit her, and from time to time receive her as my guest. More you will not require. I enclose a few words for her.'

The few words ran thus :

‘H.M.S. *Troubridge*: off Sierra Leone.

‘MY DEAR NIECE,

‘I have been deeply moved by all that your aunt has written to me about your troubles. It is in her nature to think too highly of those whom she likes; but the spirit and tone of your womanly letter to her satisfy me that she is justified in regarding you with affectionate admiration. I join with her in thanking you for applying to us for the assistance to which you are entitled, and concur heartily in everything she has said for your encouragement. Your scheme for establishing yourself in life has my unqualified approval, and be assured that everything we can do for its success shall be done cordially and thoroughly by your father’s brother. Be of good cheer, and may heaven protect you.

‘Your affectionate uncle.

‘GEOFFREY CHALLONER.’

‘You may not think him cold and hard,’ pleaded Antoinette Challoner, when Clemaine raised a pair of brimming eyes from this brief note.

‘Cold? hard? Dear aunt,’ ejaculated the niece, ‘I am moved to my heart’s deepest depths by his kindness. It is such a relief to me that my scheme has his approval—his *unqualified* approval. I had a fear, and so much reason for fearing, that he would not like my

plan,—would think it too openly self-dependent. What a dear, good uncle he is !

And, in her delight at ‘the unqualified approval,’ Clemaine raised the note to her lips, and kissed the dear, good uncle’s signature.

As she regarded thus thankfully the few words written to her by the uncle who would care for her but could not love her, it may be imagined that Clemaine Donaldson’s brimming eyes overflowed with tears of gratitude at the carefully selected passages, which Antoinette Challoner read to her from the lengthy epistle that had been the envelope of the brief note from Sierra Leone.

By this time, six weeks had elapsed since Mrs. Challoner kept her promise to Dr. Cartwright by coming to town with a happy face, and again settled herself in the Jermyn Street lodging-house which for seven years had been the usual resting-place of Geoffrey and Antoinette Challoner, when they visited London. An establishment of superfine gentility, whose street-door was opened by a superannuated butler, this lodging-house belonged to the severely respectable Mrs. Pottenger, widow of

Samuel Pottenger, Esq., whilom of the Stock Exchange, London, whose operations in divers of the more delicate and perilous securities had brought him to financial distress, and even tarnished his professional honour, before he closed an equally enterprising and ingenious career with a brandy-bottle. A smile never failed to brighten Mrs. Pottenger's mournful visage, when the superannuated butler handed her a letter from Burnham Regis ; for of all the other ladies who from time to time slept on her superlative feather-beds, and rested by day on her chintz-covered sofas, no one was so acceptable to the lodging-house keeper as Mrs. Challoner ; no one wrote letters so expressive (as Mrs. Pottenger often remarked to her next-door neighbour and professional confidante, Mrs. Clipstone,) of 'the respect due to a gentlewoman in adversity.' Whilst the other ladies wrote their desires and requests in the third person, 'ever yours sincerely, Antoinette Challoner,' always opened her notes with, 'Dear Mrs. Pottenger.' Whilst the gentlewomen, who desired and requested in the third person, were exacting on points touching the size and furniture of their rooms, Mrs.

Challoner only asked for quarters of any kind in the house where she could 'imagine herself at home.'

After her first sojourn at 42, Jermyn Street, Mrs. Challoner never came to it straight from Berkshire without a present of fruit or flowers for the widow of Samuel Pottenger, Esq.

'These are a sample of my Berkshire roses,' Antoinette remarked on one occasion to her professional entertainer, 'and you will allow they are beauties, though your gardener at Clapham may have produced better,'—an allusion to the garden of Mrs. Pottenger's better days, that was peculiarly gratifying to 'the gentlewoman in adversity.'

The roses were still things of beauty, when Mrs. Pottenger remarked to her congenial next-door-neighbour,

'Mrs. Challoner of Burnham Regis never forgets that a gentlewoman remains a gentlewoman, though necessity compels her to let furnished apartments. Of all the ladies to whom I have mentioned the style in which I used to live before the late Mr. P.'s reverses, Mrs. Challoner is the only one who seems to remember

what I was. And she is so perfectly the lady, when one seeks to ascertain her wishes about dinner, and so forth ! It's impossible to do less than one's best for a client, who leaves everything to one's own discretion.'

Perhaps Antoinette Challoner's civilities would have been less gratifying to Mrs. Pottenger, had the latter known how Mrs. Challoner sympathized with all persons, whatever their fortunes and misfortunes, who came under her observation.

CHAPTER XII.

WORK THE COMFORTER.

THE process of ‘crying it all out over the red and yellow leaves in Berkshire’ would have been more fruitful of tears, and in other ways more afflicting to the mourner, had she not found employment for her mind and body in preparing for her withdrawal from Burnham Regis. With the assistance of her willing maids, Antoinette Challoner packed the books and papers of her husband’s library and her own morning-room into the series of boxes which Jack Dalling, the carpenter and cheer-master of Burnham Regis, constructed in obedience to her directions,—a spell of work that caused Mr. Dalling to remark in the bosom of his family,

‘Trust Madam Challoner to give everything

she can to Burnham Regis work-people! She is not the sort of madam to send work and money out of the parish, when there are people in the parish competent to do the work and earn the money.'

After putting away the books and papers, Antoinette Challoner threw herself into the cleaner labour of putting her stores of raiment and household linen into another series of weather-proof cases. Moreover, whilst Rebecca the crusty, and Polly the round-eyed, and Fanny the audacious, did the rougher part of this homely labour, their mistress fell to work on making two inventories of her household effects,—inventory A. of such articles of furniture as should be moved to the suitable house for which she would soon be looking in suitable neighbourhoods; and inventory B. of such sticks and stuff as should be sold by auction, if Mr. Anderson should decline to take them at a valuation. There was also much hard labour in shifting furniture from room to room, so as to prevent confusion of the two sets of inventoried goods and chattels,—labour of which Mrs. Challoner persisted in taking a full share, not-

withstanding the audacious Fanny's protest against so strange an abuse of her mistress's strength and energy.

‘Indeed, m'm, you just shouldn't tire yourself in that way,’ urged Fanny the audacious, in the absence of Rebecca and Polly. ‘Such work isn't fit for you, m'm; and why should you do it, when your own three maids (to say nothing of the men from the garden) could do all the lifting and pulling about, if you'd only sit still and give your orders? You'll be making yourself ill, m'm, if you go on as you are doing.’

‘I work, child,’ Antoinette Challoner replied, with equal fervour and sadness, ‘because I want the comfort of work. I am ill—ill at heart. How should I be happy, with my husband so far away? And work is a sweet comforter to a sorrowful woman. What a merciful God to punish us with no heavier punishment than such a blessing as the need to work hard. Think of that, Fanny, if you are ever inclined to murmur at having to toil for your living, and earn it with the sweat of your brow.’

‘I shouldn't care, m'm, how hard I worked, if

the work would make me only a quarter as good as you are,' responded Fanny, with emotion, that was qualified with alarm at her mistress's sorrowful earnestness.

'So you think me a good woman,' rejoined Antoinette Challoner, with a smile mitigating the melancholy of her gentle countenance 'Well, you may think so, if you like; for it won't do you harm to think me better than I am. But you mayn't say so again.'

In the evening, when her admiration of her mistress's wonderful goodness had been succeeded by a boastful desire to stagger her fellow-servants with another demonstration of her intimacy with 'the missis,' Fanny remarked to Rebecca and Polly, as they sat together at supper,

'Ah, me! the poor dear missis is beginning to fret for the master. I know'd how it would be. I know'd that cheerfulness of hers was nothing more than make-believe, and that sooner or later she'd be breaking down. And now the poor dear is breaking down as I know'd she would, and is fretting her dear heart into fiddlestrings. Yes, Rebecca, you may take my

word for it that, after all, missises and servants are made of the same flesh and blood, and feel much the same, though missises that are ladies born, like *my* missis, have too much pride to let themselves fall into the 'sterics.'

'Spose you want me and Polly to believe that the missis has been telling you she's a-fretting?' answered the crusty and short-spoken Rebecca.

'If you don't care to hear what missis said to me this very afternoon, as we two sat together and talked confidential, I can hold my tongue.'

'You'd better hold it hard and tight, if you want to be gossiping about the missis. I'm in no humour for any of *your* impudence to-night. I had rather hear Polly speak a word.'

'I don't see that Fanny has any cause to boast of having worried the missis a'most to tears, which I heard her doing with my own ears,' said the round-eyed Polly, with pugnacious severity, 'ay, with my own ears, as the door of the morning-room was wide open, and I was sorting linen at the table in the passage, when she fancied I was downstairs. Yes, cook, I

heard Fanny go at the missis, a'most to the point of scolding her, for working too hard with us servants,—just as if it wasn't for the missis to know what is best for her, and to work as much and as little as she pleases. And so she went on at missis, till in order to make her hold her peace, the missis said she wasn't happy, and had took to working in order to get away from her misery. And that's the long and the short of what passed 'twixt missis and Fanny, as they “two sat together and talked confidential.” If I had worrited the missis in that fashion, and squeezed (so to speak) the very heart out of her, I should at least have had the decency to keep quiet about the matter, instead of talking of what had passed when I and missis “sat together and talked confidential.” But then I can't imagine myself a-worriting my missis in such an impident and barbarous manner; for, though I was born and bred to servitude, I come of honest parents (thank the Lord!) who paid the extra tuppence for me when I was young, and trained me to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters, in accordance with the words of the sacred catechism, amen.'

‘There, you’ve said enough,’ remarked the short-spoken Rebecca. ‘You are only wasting breath in trying to teach manners to Fanny. You’d better be putting away the plates, Polly, while I make things straight for the night.’

‘And I’ll go off to *my* missis,’ remarked Fanny, as she retired with exasperating serenity from her uncongenial fellow-servants. ‘Good-night, Rebecca,’ said the audacious parlour-maid, making a low courtesy at the kitchen-door, ‘and wishing that you may get up to-morrow morning in a better temper. As for you, Polly,’ added the self-complacent young woman, after vindicating her manners with an even more profound gesture of reverence to the house-maid, ‘don’t trouble yourself with thinking that I shall tell *my* missis how you played the eaves-dropper on our confidential talk. But, indeed, my dear, you should cure yourself of that bad habit of prying and listening at doors ajar, which is wholly unbecoming a young woman on whose manners so much care and money were spent by her affectionate parents.’

Had she not discerned in Polly’s bright eyes and flushing face a disposition to use the supper-

plates as instruments of war, Fanny would have continued to indulge her satiric genius. Taking a more prudent course, the sarcastic parlour-maid went off to *her* mistress without provoking the offspring of honest parents to commit a breach of the peace.

‘Well,’ ejaculated Polly, when her enemy had gone out of view and earshot, ‘I do pity the poor young man who has promised to take that sauce-box for better and worse at the turn of the year.’

‘She’ll *honour* him with a vengeance,’ remarked Rebecca, with the bitterness of a woman who had made several unsuccessful attempts to establish herself in matrimony.

‘Yes, she’ll honour him sweetly,—first with her tongue, and then with her fingers! For she can be *that* violent, when her hair has been combed the wrong way. And he, too, the smartest and risingest young tradesman in the whole street! I can’t help a-pitying him.’

‘’Twill serve him right, for being caught by fine airs and a pretty face.’

After perfecting her domestic arrangements for withdrawing from the Laurels, Antoinette

Challoner, whose spirits rose under the salutary influence of the work into which she had thrown herself so vehemently, made farewell calls on her Berkshire friends,—leaving P.P.C. cards on those whom she failed to find at home, and explaining to the others that she should pass a few months in London before settling down in some neighbourhood within an easy drive from the great town. She was still making these valedictory visits when Mr. Anderson appeared at the Laurels, in consequence of a note he had received from the tenant of his Berkshire house. As Mrs. Challoner wished to leave Burnham Regis something sooner than the expiration of Captain Challoner's lease, the rich Australian would be only too happy to take the estate off her hands. In other particulars, the landlord was ready to act in accordance with Mrs. Challoner's wishes. Agreeing to buy whatever furniture she had determined to offer him at a valuer's appraisal, he took into his service the whole of his out-going tenant's staff of servants, with the exception of the parlour-maid, whose pretty face and stylish airs had enthralled the smartest young tradesman of the parish.

Moreover, whilst consenting to do everything that she could reasonably require of him, Mr. Anderson, in his delight at getting immediate possession of the Laurels, and in his chivalric disposition to please so pleasing a gentlewoman, promised to take good care of Mrs. Challoner's pony, toy-dogs, cats, caged birds, choice poultry and other pets, until it should be convenient to her to remove them from Burnham Regis. Had Geoffrey Challoner been in England, it is conceivable that his wife's withdrawal from Berkshire would have been attended with a larger measure of personal inconvenience to herself. In the execution of affairs of business, capable and charming women are sometimes more hindered than helped by the presence and co-operation of their husbands.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOPE AND FEAR.

QUIT of all responsibility for the Laurels when she slipped quietly away from Burnham Regis, Antoinette Challoner had rested for no long period in her familiar quarters under Mrs. Pottenger's roof, when she made herself answerable for the rent, rates, and taxes of Raleigh Lodge, North Bank Road, Regent's Park.

When the Harfords and Donaldsons agreed to share the same villa, Raleigh Lodge was hired of its owner by Frederick Harford, soon after he encountered the financial reverses that made him glad to occupy a subordinate position in the house of Boldero and Clarkson, King's Street, Cheapside, for the sake of a salary that was little more than adequate to his manner of living in the north-western suburb. A typical

gentleman (emphatically 'a gentleman') with something to do in the city, Emmeline Harford's husband had been cheered during his period of adversity by a conviction that his rich uncle, Peter Boldero of London and Calcutta, would in due course and at his own time offer more lucrative employment to a nephew, whose commercial misfortunes had in no way tarnished his honour or affected the stainless reputation of the Bolderos. And Frederick Harford's confidence in his uncle's beneficence was justified by the event. After testing his young kinsman's capacity and rectitude, Peter Boldero determined to establish him in Calcutta, as the representative and junior partner of the great firm of Boldero and Clarkson.

Before Clemaine's prospect was brightened by her aunt's sympathy and assistance, the Harfords had resolved that on their departure from England they would give the young widow their share of the furniture of Raleigh Villa, and offer to leave their children under her custody on terms that would afford her the means of subsistence. But Antoinette Chalonier's action had so far changed their friend's

position, that they hesitated from motives of delicacy to make either the gift or the proposal. Before the close of December, when it had been finally settled at King's Street, Cheapside, that they should sail from the Thames for Calcutta in the course of next March, Frederick and Emmeline Harford decided to confide their infants to a near relation at Hampstead, and to be silent about their project for endowing Clemaine with their household goods and chattels. At the same time, the Harfords dismissed the design of pre-paying the rent for the remainder of their tenure of the villa. As Mrs. Challoner wished to take Raleigh Lodge off their hands, for her own and her niece's home from March till Michaelmas, Mr. Harford could only consent to the lady's desire.

Passing her nights in Jermyn Street, Antoinette Challoner spent the greater part of her days, between the middle of December and the last week of February, at the villa in the vicinity of the Regent's Park. Regarding the Harfords with a friendliness that, under favourable conditions, would have deepened to affectionate attachment, the sympathetic woman daily be-

came more and more sensible of her niece's generous endowments, and at the same time more strongly fascinated by her voice and address. Understanding one another from the first hour of their reunion, the aunt and niece were singularly congenial in taste, temper, and intellectual disposition. Delighting thus vividly in the woman whom she charged herself with having grievously injured, Antoinette Challoner was acutely troubled by her husband's unrelenting attitude to the niece, who was so deserving of his affection. But, after her one impulsive entreaty that Clemaine would not 'think him hard and cold,' the loyal wife gave no expression to her regret for his want of warmth towards Dorothy Challoner's child.

On the contrary, accommodating herself to the humour of the young woman, who was so pathetically grateful for her uncle's cold beneficence and bare justice, Antoinette Challoner, alike in the presence and absence of the Harfords, spoke with apparent satisfaction of her husband's unqualified approval of Clemaine Donaldson's scheme for a career of self-sustaining industry. It was impossible for the sympa-

thetic and considerate aunt to hint her secret distaste for the project, which was so agreeable to Clemaine that her face brightened with gratification whenever it was alluded to in her hearing.

The first weeks of February had come and gone, when Clemaine, falling suddenly from her usual state of serene hopefulness to a melancholy mood, remarked to Antoinette,

‘But all these pleasant plans for my future contentment may end in nothing. Heaven only knows what may happen in a few days.’

‘Whatever may happen, we shall be in God’s hands,’ rejoined Antoinette, touched by the tender sadness of her companion’s voice and countenance.

‘To feel that, to *know* it—is so comforting. Last night, dear aunt Antoinette, when I roused myself from a painful dream, and felt the tears on my cheeks, and was shaking with terror, it did so comfort me to say those very words: “Whatever may happen, I shall be in God’s hands.” As I slipped back again to sleep, I was so comforted by feeling God’s arm all about me. It matters little whether we live in this or

another world. It soothed me, oh! it soothed me so tenderly last night, to think how happy I should be in either case—with Luther in heaven, or with my child on earth. Between two such hopes there ought to be no room for despondency. And yet, and yet—I was so weak and feeble a thing last night, that for a brief while I lost view of the two hopes, and trembled through my whole body, and shivered with panic.’

‘And you will be trembling and shivering again,’ said Antoinette Challoner, coming to the sofa on which Clemaine was sitting, ‘if you don’t lay up your feet and put your head on this pillow which I am smoothing for you.’

‘Thank you, dear, thanks!’ said Clemaine, falling back upon the pillow. ‘Dear aunt, you have such tender ways; you could handle a butterfly without taking any of the bloom from its wings.’

‘I should not hurt such a substantial butterfly as you. Now, I’ll put the candles out, and we’ll sit by the firelight. I’ll do the talking, you the listening; or, if you talk, it must be in whispers.’

After darkening the room and seating herself

on a low chair by the invalid's side, Antoinette Challoner continued: 'You mayn't give way to the nervous fancies that will be troubling you during the next few days. Cherish both thoughts, but think less of Luther in heaven than of the child who will soon be with you in this world. Look forward to the time when you'll be the mistress of a grand school at Bath, with the girls honouring you and clinging to you. Be set on remaining in this world, and doing good in it throughout many years, before you go away to the better life.'

'I won't give way more than I can help. But, though I know God's arm is about me, I know also that I am entering the path of peril,' Clemaine answered, in a low voice.

'Yes, some peril—but not much—no more peril than one encounters in a thunderstorm.'

'Possibly, no more danger than that; but still one in a few thousands or so is struck by the lightning, and that amount of danger is terrifying to a weak and nervous wanderer.'

'Yes, yes. But you must be brave and calm and thankful—yes, very thankful. How often, Clemaine, have I prayed heaven to be as you

are now, and, oh ! how thankful should I have been had God granted me my desire ! I have never confessed so much to any other woman. But in talking to you, dear one, I am only talking to myself ; for you are part of myself,—words that caused Clemaine to raise one of Antoinette's hands to her lips, and kiss it repeatedly.

‘ You mayn't excite yourself, dear heart ! ’ said Antoinette, who would have withdrawn her hand, had Clemaine held it less firmly.

‘ I am not exciting myself, ’ said Clemaine, quietly, ‘ for I am only loving you, and to love you is so calming and strengthening. Let me have your hand ; it is so soft and tender and soothing—so like your voice and your whole self.’

‘ But I must leave you now, to make a call on a friend before returning to dinner at Jermyn Street. I have a character for punctuality to maintain with dear old Mrs. Pottenger. You must let me go now.’ Rising as she spoke the last words, Antoinette added, as she moved towards the door, ‘ Shall I ask Emmeline to sit with you ? ’

‘No ; she’ll come when she has put her children to bed. She must not be taken from her children now, for she insists on taking them to-morrow to Hampstead and leaving them there,—so that the house may be quieter, when I am ill. So let her be. Moreover, I would be left alone for a while, so that I may think about you. I sha’n’t give way to nervous fancies. But you must come to me early to-morrow—as early as you can, I mean, without putting yourself too much out of the way.’

‘I shall be here early,—be sure of that.’

‘What a trouble I am to you !’

‘Yes, a great trouble,’ Antoinette Challoner replied banteringly, ‘and, of course, I would rather pass the hours in my lonely lodging than in your company. Now, be a good child till to-morrow morning.’

Better than her word, Antoinette Challoner returned to Raleigh Lodge soon after the usual hour for closing the house for the night. Hence it came to pass that she was at Clemaine’s side when the latter was visited by another bad dream somewhere about two a.m. The first cry had scarcely escaped the dreamer’s lips

when Antoinette was standing over her and slipping an arm under her neck, whilst she at the same time put a cool, soft hand on the patient's forehead.

‘Oh,—oh!’ ejaculated Clemaine, as she passed from broken sleep to perfect consciousness, ‘I thought it was God’s arm, and it was your arm.’

‘It was God’s arm also,’ Antoinette Challoner returned, ‘for human love is part of His love, and the comfort and strength that come to us from human love are His gifts.’

‘But, dear Aunt Antoinette, how did you manage to get into this room in the middle of the night?’

‘By returning to the house when you had been two hours in bed. Emmeline was expecting me, and let me in. I did not enter like a thief by night, but like an honest woman, with my sleeping-gown in a little hand-bag. I was sitting in the easy-chair, with a novel, when your cry brought me to your side.’

‘But why all this?’

‘On leaving you yesterday, I went to the dear doctor, and had a talk with him; and he

agreed with me in thinking that, if the dream came again, it would be well for some one to put a quick end to it, and save you from another trembling fit. So I returned to sit up with you, and prevent the dream from worrying you.'

'It's very good of you, but indeed you need not have put yourself so much out of the usual way. You know, Emmeline put a bell up the other day, so that I could ring for her. Indeed, you have thought too much for me and too little for yourself. Emmeline promised to come at the first tinkle of the bell.'

'Which would not have been rung, till the dream had worried you into tears. Moreover, my pet,' Antoinette added apologetically, 'this busy-body of an aunt would have been too miserable in Jermyn Street. She wanted so much to be near you. I *have* saved you from the worst of the dream.'

'But not from the tears,' returned Clemaine, with naïve playfulness and the pleasant sadness of a thankful heart, 'not from the tears. I sha'n't fret, as I did last night. But I must enjoy a few tears, for you and Emmeline are both so good to me. What a sly, secretive

little puss she was,—to put me to bed so demurely, without giving me a hint that you were coming back. You two are so good to me!—and, as you say, human love is a part of God's love! Don't say anything till I have done crying. It will be only for a minute.'

'Well, you may cry for a minute-and-half, but not a second longer. See,' added Antoinette Challoner, taking her watch from the toilet-table, and retiring to the easy-chair and the shaded lamp by which she had been reading her novel, 'I'll time you by the second-hand of my watch. Make the most of your ninety seconds; a great deal of crying can be done in ninety seconds.'

'And what did the doctor say?' inquired Clemaine, with commendable composure, when the ninety seconds had been fully ticked out.

'Everything that was cheering, and nothing that was reverse. Nervous fears and painful dreams are mere matters of course to patients in your state. He had already ordered your nurse to come here by mid-day to-morrow, that is, by the noon of to-day. He is confident that everything will go well.'

‘Of course,’ said Clemaine, with humorous lightness, ‘he’ll come here on his way home from a patient in this neighbourhood,—possibly from the patient who lives within a hundred yards of Raleigh Lodge.’

‘No doubt; and now, you saucy puss, you must close your eyes and go to sleep, as soon as I have put some coal on the fire. There, the fire will do for the rest of the night. Now go to sleep, and leave me to the enjoyment of my novel.’

‘I’ll go to sleep—I am turning sleepy again.’

But, though she closed her eyes, Clemaine remained awake for some time longer, now thinking of her Luther in heaven, and now of the child who would soon be in this world, thinking of both tranquilly and hopefully, while the reader on the other side of the room turned over the leaves of her interesting novel.

‘Aunt,’ she said, when she had been silent for half-an-hour, ‘I am still awake, but I am quite happy—so very happy.’

‘That’s well, my pet; but it would be better for you to be asleep.’

‘The sleep will come soon, for my mind is peaceful.’

‘What have you been thinking about?’

‘A few minutes since I was thinking how fortunate it has been for me that I wrote to you. I feel a better woman for having lived to know and love you.’

‘It was fortunate for both of us.’

‘Then I fell a-thinking of my two hopes, and I am resting so tranquilly on both of them. Either way I shall be happy.’

‘Yes, yes; but do try to sleep. I want rest, but may not take any, while you are thus wakeful.’

Taking the entreaty and the reproof as any manageable child would have taken them from an indulgent and weary mother, Clemaine again closed her eyes, and, after closing them, lay silent for so long a time, that the novel reader imagined her charge must have fallen into slumber. But though slumber was nearer, and drowsiness weighed more heavily on her eyelids, Clemaine was still wakeful enough to think and speak.

‘Dear one,’ she prayed faintly, ‘let me see you once more, and have another kiss before I drop a-sleep.’

‘Well, one more kiss, just one,’ responded the sympathetic nurse, speaking as though Clemaine were a child who almost needed punishment, ‘and then if you don’t go to sleep I shall be compelled to give you the anodyne draught that I brought with me from Welbeck Street.’

‘That would be a terrible punishment,’ said Clemaine, falling in with the humour of her nurse’s words.

Having taken the kiss thankfully, Clemaine remarked,

‘Instead of being so happy, how wretched I should be at this moment, with Emmeline on the point of starting for India, if you hadn’t come to me. But now I have nothing to worry about.’

‘Nothing, indeed, nothing to fret about.’

‘What a comfort it is to know that, if I go away, my child will be your child.’

‘Yes, your child will be my child.’

‘If it is a boy?’

‘He will be my son.’

‘And if it is a girl?’

‘She shall be my daughter.’

‘Though I am sleepy, I shall remember those

sweet words—sweet as music and not to be forgotten. Girl or boy, it shall be your child. Oh, the comfort of it—the comfort!

Like a sick child hugging its favourite toy, the sick woman played with her consolatory thought for another minute, and fell asleep with a smile on her slightly parted lips.

‘That is something to be thankful for!’ Antoinette Challoner whispered to herself, when she had stood full five minutes watching her unconscious patient. ‘It is sound, deep, natural slumber. How glad I am that I held out against her restlessness, and resisted the strong inclination to give her the sleeping-draught!’

Five hours later, when he paid her an early visit before his usual hour for breakfast, Dr. Cartwright found Clemaine tranquil in mind, and saw nothing in her condition to justify serious apprehension. To Antoinette and Emmeline, however, he made no secret of his slight dissatisfaction with the restlessness which their patient had undergone on two successive nights, and with her nervous intimations of a feeling that her approaching trouble might have a fatal issue.

‘If she were an ordinary woman, I should think nothing of her apprehensiveness. But she differs from ordinary women in being no less brave than emotional. It is not uncommon for patients in her condition to suffer from alarming presentiments and even from panic. But we may be sure that, with her courage and habitual self-control, *our* patient is more disposed to hide than reveal the mournful anticipations that are assailing her. Her manifest presentiment that things will go ill with her is doubtless stronger than her words, if she were of a weaker nature, would indicate. Under certain possible though unusual contingencies, her very courage may operate against our wishes. Should anything untoward occur to reduce her to extreme and perilous weakness, her fearlessness of death may result in a positive indisposition to live; and in that case she would lose the most powerful of what I may call her recuperative energies. Her way of talking about going to her husband may, indeed does, signify that she has no strong desire to live. The less she thinks of poor Luther just now, the better for her,—or, rather let me say, the better for us who wish to keep

her in this world. In talking with her, say everything that may confirm her failing desire for length of days, and avoid every topic that may bring her husband to her mind. Gossip with her on cheerful matters, and more particularly about Bath and the grand school she will have there.—And for your comfort, my dear ladies, let me assure you that her nervous fancies won't affect the course of her illness, unless something unusual should occur.'

In accordance with the doctor's counsel, Mrs. Challoner and Mrs. Harford were at much pains to lure the invalid from depressing thoughts, and during the next three days displayed no little ingenuity in making their talk turn upon the scheme of beneficent industry that had Uncle Geoffrey's 'unqualified approval.' Recalling the days when they were school-girls, the two conspirators entertained Clemaine with pleasant recollections of the seminaries in which they suffered under 'bad marks,' and endeavoured to carry off prizes for scholarship or good conduct. Emmeline knew more of school-life from personal experience and from the school-girl's point of view than either of her com-

panions, and some of her kindly anecdotes of governesses and professors, classes and classmates, were so droll and piquant, that the hearers of her confessions more than once or twice fell into hearty laughter. Antoinette Challoner's reminiscences of the superfine Bath boarding-school, to whose classes she gained admittance by special grace in the character of an irregularly attached 'externe,' were tame and colourless in comparison with Emmeline Harford's recollections of academic troubles and triumphs at No. 42, Osnaburgh Square, London-super-mare. But the senior raconteur had much to tell of school-girls and their manners in foreign lands. Moreover, to raise Clemaine's spirits, Geoffrey Challoner's wife produced a list of those members of her old connection in Wilts, Somerset, and Devon, whom she designed to draw into a social league, for placing her niece in the first rank of living schoolmistresses.

Partly because she was of a lighter temperament, and partly because she was less sensitive and sympathetic, Emmeline was more satisfied than Antoinette Challoner with the apparent effect of their measures for cheering their

patient. In her confidence that things were going well with Clemaine, and that she would survive her coming peril in the usual way of young mothers, Emmeline gave a cheery answer to Dr. Cartwright's inquiry, 'And how have we been going on since I was here in the morning?'

'Excellently well,' said Emmeline. 'From the moment of your departure in the morning even until now (9.30 p.m.) our darling has been in good spirits, talking more of Bath and her future life there, than of aught else. Once in the forenoon, and twice since our mid-day dinner she reverted of her own accord to the favourite topic, when I and Mrs. Challoner had agreed we would be silent about it for awhile. I have neither seen tears in her eyes, nor heard a sigh come from her lips during the whole day. Everything we do for her pleases her. In short, she has been too good—monotonously good. I should have more pleasure in waiting upon her, if she would be just a little fractious and querulous.'

Emmeline having given her report, Dr. Cartwright turned towards Antoinette Challoner

with a significant glance, that said as plainly as the tongue could have said it, ‘And now for the other side of the picture—another view of the same subject.’

‘I wish I could agree altogether with Mrs. Harford,’ said Antoinette Challoner, in answer to the physician’s unspoken inquiry, ‘and I should agree with her, if it were in my nature to accept appearances unsuspiciously. But I am far from certain that Clemaine is as tranquil and hopeful and set on living as she affects to be. I can’t help feeling that she is hiding her thoughts from us, and is only humouring us when she speaks and acts so precisely as we wish her. I am afraid she is cleverer than both of her managing friends, and quite as good an actress as either of them. To spare their feelings, she is playing with them. Seeing how set we are on guarding her from despondency, she affects to be cheerful; and she is silent about her husband and talkative about Bath and her future career out of deference to our wishes and from tenderness for our sensibilities. That is my view of her good behaviour.’

‘Which report do you prefer, doctor; the

report of the confiding friend, or the report of the suspicious aunt?' inquired Emmeline, in whose parlour the conference took place.

'Your view of the case is the more agreeable, but——'

'*But?*' interposed Emmeline, with the air of a victim of injustice. 'You need say no more. You think me the less discerning, and therefore the inferior nurse. Be generous in this hour of your triumph, Mrs. Challoner.'

'No one can be a better nurse than you, Mrs. Harford,' returned the physician; 'you are a tender and devoted nurse (I have reason to acknowledge it), and always cheerful, as nurses ought to be. As a nurse, you are not Mrs. Challoner's inferior; but I rather think she would make the better physician.'

'This is unendurable, Dr. Cartwright!' ejaculated Emmeline, with a show of keener resentment. 'You first soothe me with a compliment, and then in my hearing and presence put my rival over my head, and rate her as a physician. But I will be superior to jealousy, and generous to my rival. Mrs. Challoner is the cheerfullest nurse imaginable.'

‘With two such nurses by her side, my patient must do well,’ said the doctor stoutly, as he rose from his seat in Emmeline Harford’s parlour.

‘You have no misgiving, doctor?’ Mrs. Challoner inquired quickly, and with impressive earnestness.

‘Why should I be less hopeful now than I was the other day, when I assured you that all would go well, provided nothing unusual should occur. There has been no recurrence of the convulsive tremor and shivering-fit, she has had three tranquil days. I see no reason for apprehension.’

‘But you are less than altogether hopeful,’ urged Antoinette.

‘I am confident that all will go well,’ the doctor answered steadily, ‘unless some one of the possible but unusual contingencies, to which I referred the other day, should change and darken the prospect.’

‘Won’t you look at her before you go?’ said Geoffrey Challoner’s wife.

‘I had better not disturb her,’ was the answer. ‘My appearance might alarm her. Don’t let

her know that I dropped in thus late to inquire how the day had gone with her. Till she needs me urgently, your one aim must be to keep her tranquil and hopeful; and to do that, my dear madam, you must be tranquil and hopeful yourself.'

'I should be both, if it were not for "the possible but unusual contingencies." Would to heaven those contingencies were impossible.'

'Ah, my dear madam,' returned the doctor, holding out his small white hand for the farewell shake, 'it would be a happier world for us doctors if there were no such contingencies.'

With these words Dr. Cartwright took leave of Clemaine's friends, and withdrew for a few hours from the house, to which he returned at early dawn in obedience to an urgent summons.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHY IS IT ?

SOMETIMES, though seldom, the approach of a calamity is heralded by those invisible and voiceless harbingers of doom, who inform the mind and stir the heart by organs more impressive than speech, acting upon nerves more sensitive and finely apprehensive than the nerves of hearing. On their delivery, these warnings from fate become those veritable presentiments that differ from the delusive previsions of fancy in being invariably followed by fulfilment.

For several days Antoinette Challoner and Dr. Cartwright had been troubled by growing apprehension for Clemaine's safety in her approaching illness ; and through sympathy each of them had discovered the unrest and mournful

foreboding of the other's breast. The hour was now at hand that would cause them to attribute their dismal prognostications to inscrutable and unrelenting destiny, or justify them in dismissing the vain fears, as the mere offspring of affectionate solicitude and disordered imagination.

On entering the room that had been the young widow's bridal-chamber, Dr. Cartwright was confronted by one of those untoward but most unusual contingencies, which were in his mind when he declared that in their absence Clemaine would have a fair and fortunate passage to maternal felicity. It was a contingency, which made it certain that the invalid would endure far more than an average measure of the bodily torture that comes to womankind from the primeval curse,—‘I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children.’ Worse still; the contingency, which subjected the sufferer to rack of muscle and torture of nerve,—anguish that knew neither remedy nor palliative before the recent anesthetic discoveries,—resulted in another and even more alarming contingency,

that in a few minutes reduced Clemaine to extreme and perilous prostration.

Even so, the course of Clemaine's tribulation was longer, and for awhile promised to be less deplorable in result than Dr. Cartwright feared it would prove, whilst he fought skilfully and despairingly with death over his patient's prostrate form. Clemaine's babe was born alive, and she survived the birth of the fair and shapely female infant. But, even as the child raised its first thin, sharp cry in this sad world, the mother became unconscious. The next hours were passed by Clemaine Donaldson in a series of swoons, divided by intervals of consciousness, during which she recognized the watchers about her bed, and even addressed them in faint and broken words of endearment and gratitude. During two of these intervals, the babe was brought to Clemaine at her request, in order that she might gaze on the being that had proceeded from her and the husband to whom she felt herself to be journeying; but though she regarded the infant with searching, sad, tender, tearless eyes, she gave no intimation of a wish that this life from her life

should be placed between her arms and upon her breast.

It favoured the failing hopes, to which Antoinette Challoner and Emmeline Harford clung despairingly even to the last, that the swoons became more brief, and each interval of consciousness longer than the previous interval, and that Clemaine took readily, and even with relish, the nutriment and wine that were offered to her after each fainting fit. To what straws does despair cling! By what trifles can dying hopes be resuscitated! It was thus that Clemaine's life, hanging on a single fine thread, oscillated for some sixty hours between extinction and revival, now quickening the hope and now deepening the despair that reigned alternately in the breasts of her fond attendants. At length, a startling change came over the patient's countenance,—a change showing that some influence was accelerating the heart's action, and that the natural stimulant of strong emotion was raising the energies of an enfeebled body and fading mind. The change was a process strangely beautiful to its beholders and strangely beautifying to the object of their

solicitude,—a process that, lasting for several minutes, added momentarily to the tender loveliness of the young mother's face, till it became in serenity and radiance even as the face of an angel.

‘Aunt,’ Clemaine Donaldson said softly, after resting in tranquil consciousness for several minutes, ‘raise me with your dear arm, and put me on my pillows, so that I may sit a little up, and look round at my pretty room, with its pleasant fire, and bright candles, and dear pictures. Oh, this is comfortable!—you have placed me so nicely!—Let me see baby again.’

The babe having been brought to her bedside, Clemaine regarded it tenderly, as it lay in the arms of its nurse—a young woman with a handsome face, whom Dr. Cartwright had brought to Raleigh Lodge, to foster the infant whose mother was powerless to cherish her offspring on her own bosom.

‘It is a lovely child, very lovely! But I see nothing of Luther in it, and very little of myself. Yet she must be like some one.’

‘I think she will be like your father,’ said Antoinette Challoner.

‘I am glad you think so,’ Clemaine remarked, with satisfaction in her voice and in the smile of her brightening countenance, ‘for if so she will grow to be lovely. He was very handsome. Beauty is to be desired for her; and it will be easier for uncle to love her if she should resemble his brother.—Nurse, I see you will be kind to my little one, for you have the look of a good woman. That will do, nurse; you can take baby away now. It makes me happy and thankful to see it in such tender hands.’ Not a little to the nurse’s perplexity, Clemaine added, ‘Yes, go now, nurse, for I have much to do in a short time; baby’s mother will soon be with you, for I shan’t detain her long.’ The nurse having retired from the room, Clemaine, regarding her aunt with pathetically beseeching eyes, remarked, ‘A few nights since, when we could not know whether my babe would be a boy or a girl, you said “If it is a boy——”’

‘It shall be my son,’ said Antoinette Challoner, seeing that Clemaine wished her to complete the affectionate assurance.

‘Yes, yes, you said so; thank you for saying the words again, for I wished to hear them once

more. You felt what I wished. But,' Clemaine Donaldson continued, again playing fondly with the music of the remembered words, even as a child will play with the words of a favourite story, 'my child is a girl; and you said, dear aunt, "If it is a girl——" Say the words again, dear; do say them, for they are so sweet.'

Dropping to her knees as she obeyed the entreaty, and then, looking tenderly upwards into Clemaine's glowing eyes, as she repeated the promise with strong but well-controlled emotion, Antoinette Challoner spoke these words slowly and with a sweet solemnity :

'I said, dearest, "If it is a girl, she shall be my daughter;" and, dear Clemaine, I will be to her a tender, loving, devoted mother, feeling and doing all and everything in the way of maternal attachment and service that it is possible for a woman to feel and do for a child not actually born of her own body and her own pain; and I will do my very utmost to render your child as dear to your uncle even as a child coming to him from my own sufferings could be. She shall be my daughter, and *my* daughter shall be to him as *his own* daughter.'

Rising from her knees when she had spoken the words of this solemn promise—words none the less charged with the passion and earnestness of intense feeling, for being uttered slowly and in a low tone—Antoinette Challoner extended her arms over Clemaine and kissed her on the lips. As she raised her face slowly from her niece's lips, Antoinette saw in the pillowed face an accession of ineffable loveliness that caused her to tremble and start slightly, and also to whiten with sudden apprehension.

‘Aunt,’ Clemaine asked composedly, ‘is there anything amiss in me that you start and turn pale?’

‘Nothing amiss,’ was the frank answer, ‘nothing amiss. It was only your lovely colour and joyful look that surprised me.’

‘Strange that they should surprise you, as it was you who made me so happy. How could I be otherwise than joyful after your words and kiss? Keep near me, darling, but say nothing more of my lovely colour. You mayn't flatter a dying woman, because the angels are brightening her face for heaven. I want to say something about baby's name. Do not name her after me.’

‘Not after you? Surely she should bear her mother’s name.’

‘Of course she should; and, as she will be your child and you will be her mother, she should be christened Antoinette—a name almost sacred to every feeling heart, and very dear to all who care for you.’

‘She shall bear my name if you wish it, darling; but she may bear your name also.’

‘Better not,’ Clemaine returned pleadingly. ‘Let her be named Antoinette Sophy. It will be easier for uncle to love her as a daughter, if she bears no name that would remind him of old troubles.’

It was the second time during the course of her ‘last words,’ that Clemaine surprised Antoinette by showing her fine feeling and clear perception that Geoffrey Challoner’s disposition to befriend his unfortunate niece was in no degree consequent on affection for her, but was rather a purpose entertained from motives of justice, honour, and humanity, *in spite* of a certain distaste for her as the child of a woman whom he held accountable for his severance from his only brother; and to Antoinette Chal-

loner the two successive revelations of the fine and accurate perception were the more astonishing and impressive, because she had been studiously reticent to Clemaine respecting the coldness of her uncle's regard for her, and Clemaine had, on no previous occasion, shown herself sensible of the coldness.

‘Sophy was my grandmother Challoner’s christian name, and the name will associate the little child at his feet with his tender thought for the mother, who passed away from him when he was still a child. I think uncle would rather have a Sophy than a Clemaine for his niece and adopted child.—But,’ added Clemaine Donaldson, with a naïve deference that at so solemn a moment was no less droll than pathetic, ‘I have no right to dictate what *your child* is to be called.’

‘She shall be christened Sophy Antoinette,’ said Geoffrey Challoner’s wife; ‘but I shall always think of her as Clemaine.’

Dismissing this important matter with an expression of gratitude for her aunt’s consent, Clemaine, seeing Emmeline at the foot of the bed, beckoned her to come nearer.

‘You’ll not forget me, old playmate,’ said Clemaine, raising both her arms to Emmeline; ‘no, you won’t forget me; but you must not remember me sadly. Such a jolly friendship as ours has been may not be fruitful of tears and regrets merely because I am in heaven. Old playmate, one last kiss.’

Putting a light and caressing hand on Clemaine’s face, and doing her brave best to refrain from sobbing out-right, the warm-hearted Emmeline kissed her friend repeatedly.

‘What good friends we have been to each other, my bonny, from earliest childhood until now!’ Clemaine said cheerily, when Emmeline had ceased kissing her. ‘Ah, me! the laughter and the fun we have had together! Were it a sin for young girls and young women to be merry together, I should be less happy and in a worse case than I imagine myself. Thank God for keeping us good friends to the last.’

‘Yes,’ said Emmeline, utterly deserted by the jovial temper and blithe spirits that had been so serviceable in sustaining Clemaine in the darkest season of her affliction, ‘good friends to the last,—good friends,—always good friends!’

‘Even when we had our grand stand-up fight in Queen’s Square?’ inquired Clemaine, with a last flash of the old merriment that had so agreeably seasoned the long intercourse of the whilom playmates.

Seeing from the convulsive movement of Emmeline’s lips that her feelings were overpowering her, Clemaine desisted from the light strain, which only troubled the heart it was meant to soothe and cheer.

‘Be brave, my darling,’ Clemaine entreated softly, ‘be brave for your old friend’s sake.’ After a brief pause she inquired: ‘Is Fred here?’

The question having been answered by a nod,—only by a vigorous nod, because Emmeline could not trust her writhing lips even for the utterances of a single syllable,—Clemaine begged that she might see him.

‘Go to Fred, darling, and send him to me,’ she said. ‘Fred has been so very good to me. I want to thank him, and wish him “Good-bye.” But come to me again, Emmeline, when I have spoken to him, for I shall soon want you at my side.’

It had not been Clemaine’s wont to think or

she speak of her friend's husband as Fred. Alike to Luther Donaldson's wife and to Luther Donaldson's widow, the young merchant, a rather staid and formal gentleman, had ever been 'Mr. Harford,'—and on the tongue, at least, nothing nearer or dearer than 'Mr. Harford.' Half-a-century since young gentlewomen were less quick than young gentlewomen of the present day to play with the most familiar designations of their male acquaintances. Indeed, they were forbidden by conventional civility to address by their christian names any men, who were neither their servants nor their nearest relatives. But the great republican, Death, smiles at etiquette, and has a gentle way of replacing its usages with easier and more affectionate modes of intercourse.

Seizing the opportunity for leaving the room and recovering her self-control, Emmeline Harford went from Clemaine's bed-side quickly as a bird escaping from confinement, and noiselessly as sunlight passing from a lawn.

'Fred,' said Clemaine, as soon as Emmeline's husband came to her presence, 'it is like you to come so quickly for a few weak words of fare-

well and a few idle thanks.—You've been very kind and good to me in several things, but above all in allowing me so much of your wife's affection. In that respect you have been very generous to both of us.'

'My dear,' replied the staid and ever formal gentleman, with less than his usual formality, 'she loved me none the less for loving you.'

'That is true; but you would have been jealous of me, had you not been more than ordinarily generous. You were very good to let us remain closer than sisters, notwithstanding your title to all her affection. You must pardon me for worrying her just now almost to tears. I was a blunderer in thinking to cheer her with words too light for the hour. Go to her now, Fred; but send her to me again for a few minutes, as soon as she has recovered from my blundering. Yes, send her to me again,' Clemaine continued, as she put her right hand in Frederick Harford's grasp, 'for I wish her to be near me at the last, holding my left hand as tenderly as you are now holding my right. And now, Fred, kiss my hand before you let it go.'

As the staid and habitually formal gentleman

lowered his head in order to give the kiss, two large hot tears fell from his eyes to her hand, which he was raising towards his descending lips.

A smile of gentle drollery played over the ineffable gladness of Clemaine's glowing face, as she stayed the descending lips by saying, quaintly,

‘You must kiss me all the same; but don't disturb the tears.’ When the kisses had been given in accordance with the direction, she added, ‘Thanks, Fred, for both—the tears and the kisses. Now, go to Emmeline, for I may need her any moment.’

For three or four minutes after Fred Harford's withdrawal, whilst Antoinette Challoner was her only companion, Clemaine prattled with alternate pleasantry and pathos of the delight of dying,—remarking how strange it was that she, like most other people, had anticipated with terror a process so fruitful of enjoyment.

‘If the dear doctor,’ she remarked, ‘would only drop in on his way home from one of his just-in-this-immediate-neighbourhood patients, my cup of happiness would brim over.—Why—

aunt,' she added, in separate ejaculations, as her quickened senses made her aware of the physician's presence,—‘it must be!—yes, it is!—oh, dear, dear doctor, how long have you been here?’

‘I dropped in,’ the doctor answered drily, ‘on my way home from patients in this immediate neighbourhood, and just in time to overhear your wish to see me.—So they have raised you in your bed, and propped you with pillows in that fashion, without having my permission to do so.’

‘It is a good attitude for the purpose, isn’t it?’ inquired Clemaine, laying a significant stress on the ‘purpose.’

‘Let me raise this pillow just a little. And now for the pulse,’ said the doctor, touching the patient’s left wrist, whilst he regarded her tenderly.

‘Well? is it a good pulse?’ Clemaine asked, when the doctor withdrew his fingers from the wrist, and returned his watch to its pocket.

‘Good enough for the purpose,’ replied the doctor, smiling sadly as he used her expression. ‘It is a weak little pulse,—but regular. It is tranquil.’

‘Like the heart it comes from,—the tranquil, happy heart.’

‘That’s well, darling !’

‘Dear doctor,’ said Clemaine faintly, when she had been silent for half-a-minute, ‘drop in now and then on Aunt Antoinette, when I’ve gone away. Drop in upon her whenever you are passing near. She’ll be lonely and low sometimes, when the Harfords have started for Calcutta, and she has no household friend but her little daughter. You won’t forget?’

‘I won’t forget.’

‘And, dear doctor, lean over me and kiss me on the forehead. Luther will like to see your kiss on my forehead when he receives me at the gate, for he loved you even as I do, and he knows how good you have been to me since he went away.’

When the kiss had been put upon her brow, Clemaine said softly,

‘And now I will close my eyes and speak in prayer to Our Father in Heaven !’

Closing her eyes as she spoke, Clemaine raised her hands to her breast and placed the palms of her hands the one against the other

in prayerful wise ; and during the next five minutes her watchers saw from the movements of her silent lips that she was meekly addressing the Creator of all human kind. Her lips were still moving thus dutifully, and her eyelids were still guarding her mind against the intrusion of earthly cares and interests, when Emmeline Harford, Frederick Harford, Nurse Charlesworth, the other and younger nurse whose charge was sleeping tranquilly in its cradle, and the young woman who had been Emmeline's and Clemaine's only and faithful servant for four years, came about the silent bed with noiseless steps. Hence it came to pass that, on ceasing to pray, and letting her hands fall upon her breast, and raising the blue-veined lids of her large and lustrous eyes, Clemaine found herself under the regard of several observers. Yet another glow of gladness came to the exceeding beauty of her face, as she saw and recognized each person of the assembly.

‘How sweet and good of you—all, all my dear ones,’ she murmured faintly, as her gaze travelled slowly round the bed, ‘all here—old playmate—Emmeline’s husband—good Sarah,

always so good—*my nurse—baby's nurse—dear doctor—dear, dear aunt.*' Extending her right arm slowly, she said softly: 'Dear aunt, take my hand and lead me.' In like manner offering her left hand to Emmeline, she said, in even a lower tone: 'Emmeline, old playmate, lead me, for my sight is going,' and as she thus spoke beseechingly to the two women, who were of all human kind dearest to her heart, she sank backward upon her yielding pillows.

She had not yet spoken her last words. Twice she was heard to murmur, 'Human love is God's love.' Something later a light cry of joyful greeting escaped her lips, followed by the words, 'Luther—dear Luther—lovely in the valley—no, not dark in the valley—no shadow—all light.'

In fancy—at least, in fancy—she had been led through the valley of the shadow of death by Antoinette and Emmeline, had found the dread valley shadowless and unutterably beautiful, and had been met by Luther at the entrance to paradise. She imagined herself—at least, she imagined herself—to be answering a question put to her by her husband, when she whispered

with her last breath, 'Yes, dear Luther,' the last words that trembled from her lips to the hearing of the watchers about her bed.

When loving hands had clothed her in the garments of the grave, and composed her limbs with reverential care for their last resting-place, nothing remained on earth of Clemaine's lissom figure and graceful shape and animating resence, but the still form that lay in a straight line on what had been her bridal bed, and the gentle face—so small and fair, so tranquil and oh, so strangely childish in its delicate lineaments—that, retaining all the sacred loveliness which came to it in the closing hours of her existence, had gained another and holier charm from the beautifying touch of death.

One short week later, when the childish face and unmoving form had been committed to the tomb, and the few mourners for her death had turned away from the cold and cruel grave, feeling that life must ever be other than it had been to them through her influence, nothing remained of Clemaine on earth, but the subduing recollections of her noble endowments and

gracious ways and untimely fate—memories making for the goodness of those who had tended her in her latest hours.

Who of us has escaped the sorrow of mourning for such an one as Clemaine,—young and winning, brave and tender of heart, energetic, yet quite unselfish, generous in her impulses, conscientious in her designs, faultless in every detail of her conduct, and wholly unaware of her exceptional goodness? The grey-headed reader, who has not lamented the premature departure of several such women, is in one respect less unfortunate than the writer of this ineffectual page. Why is it that women so young and fair, so hopeful and courageous, so strong in faith and sweetly beneficent, are taken thus early from the homes they hallow, and from a world that darkens when they die? Is it that these bright and spotless spirits are even more needful for happiness in heaven, than serviceable for righteousness on earth?

CHAPTER XV.

TOUCHING A CERTIFICATE.

THAT Clemaine Donaldson was visited by no clergyman after her accouchement is sufficiently accounted for by what has been told of her condition from the hour of her child's birth. It is needful to speak more fully of the privacy with which her child was baptized, and of the circumstances that withheld the private rite from the cognizance of the registrar of baptisms.

Built for the accommodation of a few hundred worshippers, at a time when the most provident inhabitants of the quarter were far from imagining how rapidly the population of the rural suburb would multiply, St. Jude's, Regent's Park—the church at which Emmeline and Clemaine were regular attendants and communicants for nearly four years—had become in-

adequate to the spiritual requirements of its picturesque vicinity, when it was closed to worshippers at the opening of February, 1836, and placed in the hands of an architect for enlargement and reconstruction. Builders having taken possession of the sacred edifice, the vicar started with his diocesan's approval on a trip to Rome and Palestine, leaving the Reverend William Haydon, M.A., curate in charge of what may be described as a churchless congregation. That Mr. Haydon had the vicar's authority to act as his deputy was notified to people of the district by a black board on the door of the vestry-clerk's office, inscribed with these words: 'During the alterations and re-construction of St. Jude's, Regent's Park, all communications touching baptisms, churchings, funerals, and other clerical business of the church are to be addressed to the Reverend William Haydon, M.A., Curate-in-Charge, at No. 4, Wilford Terrace.'

On withdrawing for several months from his cure, the Reverend Charles Brookfield, M.A., the vicar of St. Jude's, Regent's Park, had enjoined Mr. Haydon to be attentive in calling

on the members of the congregation, and especially observant of his duties touching baptisms. As it stood in a corner of the church, which would not be disturbed by the builders, the curate was told to encourage the matrons of the district to bring their newly-born children to the St. Jude's font for baptism, at hours when the masons and other artificers would not be at their noisy work. At the same time, in consideration of the disorder of the church, he was instructed to perform the rite privately in every case, where the parents or other guardians of a newly-born infant should prefer the private function. He had also been enjoined by the vicar to see that the private baptisms were entered in the register with due exactness. A careful and conscientious young man, Mr. Haydon was at great pains to carry out the instructions he had received from the absent vicar. Consequently, had Emmeline Harford or Antoinette Challoner requested the curate-in-charge to baptize Clemaine Donaldson's child at Raleigh Lodge, the baptism would have been promptly recorded in the St. Jude's baptismal register.

But considerations determined the ladies of

Raleigh Lodge to ask another clergyman to perform the private rite, by which Clemaine's baby was admitted to the church militant. Whilst she regarded the vicar of St. Jude's, Regent's Park, with the enthusiasm that so often qualifies a gentlewoman's disposition towards her favourite clergyman, Emmeline Harford had conceived a strong distaste for the vicar's curate-in-charge, who had come to the congregation so recently as New Year's day, and had been so unfortunate as to offend the lady by a trivial brusquerie during the first week of his connection with the church. Having earned Mrs. Harford's disfavour by a mere fault of manner, the curate-in-charge became greatly distasteful to Mr. Frederick Harford, and in some degree unacceptable to Mrs. Donaldson, ever slow to deem her old playmate mistaken in anything. On hearing his wife's case against the curate, Mr. Harford had remarked warmly, 'Were it not for my respect for his cloth, I should give the gentleman a lesson in civility.' It was enough for Clemaine to say in her gentle way, 'We will not be too severe on him for being less courteous than the vicar.' Under

these circumstances, it is not surprising that Mr. and Mrs. Harford agreed with Mrs. Challoner, when she suggested that they should ask Mr. Patrick Mansfield to baptize Clemaine's child.

The Reverend Patrick Mansfield, M.A., was still staying with his brother-in-law, Dr. Cartwright of Welbeck Street, when Antoinette Challoner made this suggestion.

The result was that on the day before he took ship at the West India Dock for his return-voyage to Barbadoes, where he was rector of St. John's parish, and just three days before the Harfords sailed for Calcutta in the other Indies, the Reverend Mr. Mansfield came with his brother-in-law to Raleigh Lodge, and brought little Sophia Antoinette Donaldson within the lines of the Church of England,—the ceremony being performed in the presence of Antoinette Challoner, the two Harfords, Dr. Cartwright, and Rose Drakeford, the comely and well-favoured young woman, who had cherished the little Sophy on her breast almost from the first hour of the child's existence.

Of the picturesque group that surrounded Clemaine's infant during the performance of the

sacred ceremony, Rose Drakeford was far from being the least striking and picturesque personage. Considerably taller than Emmeline Harford, and almost equal to Antoinette Challoner in stature, Rose Drakeford had the air of a gentlewoman, though she was only the wife of a clever marquetry-worker, and wore a dress appropriate to a person of her humble condition. Comely in her countenance, by reason of her aquiline profile, good mouth, dark eyes, and the delicate purity of an olive complexion that glowed on either cheek with roseate brightness, Rose was the more pleasing to her new acquaintances at Raleigh Lodge, and to the doctor who had introduced her to them, because her noble face was pervaded by the air of recent and subduing sorrow. Enough for the present of the handsome young woman, who was less moved by the offer of liberal wages than by a desire to oblige Dr. Cartwright, when she consented at his urgent request to foster a stranger's child.

Little Sophia Antoinette having been made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, with due

regard for scriptural and canonical requirements, and Rose Drakeford having retired with her charge from the parlour (so recently 'Clemaine's parlour') in which the baptismal rite had been performed, the rector of St John's parish, in the island of Barbadoes, asked for writing materials in order that he might make a certificate of the ceremony, for the information of the curate in charge of St. Jude's church.

'As you don't need my help in that matter, I'll be off to my patients,' said Dr. Cartwright, as he hastened from the room, setting an example that was quickly followed by the Harfords.

'If you do not require our presence any longer, Mr. Mansfield,' Frederick Harford observed, with a gesture of courtesy, as the Barbadian rector was taking his first dip of ink at the writing-desk to which Mrs. Challoner had led him, 'Mrs. Harford and I will wish you good-bye, and a happy voyage to Barbadoes, as we shall barely have time to keep our appointment at Hampstead.'

Having no further need of their presence, Mr. Mansfield allowed Frederick and Emmeline to

go their way to Hampstead, where they were engaged to stay for a couple of nights, at the house of the relative who had already taken charge of their children.

‘Now for the certificate,’ observed the clergyman, resuming his seat and re-dipping his pen, when, through the withdrawal of the other witnesses of the baptism, Antoinette Challoner had become his only companion in the parlour.

On its completion the certificate ran to this effect :

‘ 22nd March, 1836.

‘I, Patrick Mansfield, M.A., Oxon, clerk in holy orders, and rector of St. John’s parish, in the Island of Barbadoes, in the West Indies, do hereby certify that I did, on this 22nd day of March, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six, baptize according to the rites of the United Church of England and Ireland, the daughter of the late Luther Donaldson, landscape-painter, and Clemaine his wife, by the name of Sophia Antoinette, at Raleigh Lodge, No. 12, North Bank Road, Regent’s Park, late the abode of the said Luther and Clemaine.

‘PATRICK MANSFIELD, M.A., etc.

‘To the Reverend William Haydon, M.A.,
Curate in charge of St. Jude’s Church,
Regent’s Park.’

‘Give this certificate,’ said the Barbadian rector, as he handed the paper to Mrs. Challoner,

after reading it aloud and rather pompously, ‘to the Reverend Mr. Haydon, in order that he may make record of the baptism in the proper register of his church.’

‘That should be done at once?’ enquired Antoinette Challoner, fishing for further information about the paper of testimony.

‘Within twenty-four hours,’ replied Mr. Mansfield, with increasing pomposity, and in a tone of authoritativeness that would have been excessive had Antoinette Challoner been a Sunday-school mistress, and he been the Archbishop of Canterbury. ‘Observe,—the statute of 52 George the Third, chapter 146, by which the registration of baptisms is now wisely and sufficiently governed, requires that every officiating minister as soon as possible after the solemnization of every baptism, whether public or private, shall record the same baptism in the proper register, and shall also with his own hand sign the same record; and this he must do within the seven days next following the ceremony, unless he shall be prevented by sickness or unavoidable impediment. Do I make myself plain to you?’

‘I think so,’ replied Antoinette Challoner, with the air of an intelligent pupil, grateful for crumbs of valuable information. ‘What you have said refers to an officiating minister, acting within the limits of his own parish or special district?’

‘Precisely, my dear madam, to an officiating minister acting within the limits of his own parish or special district,’ answered the Barbadian rector, in the condescending style of a professor benignly recognizing a favourite pupil’s latest display of intelligence. ‘And now,’ continued the benign professor, seizing an opportunity for showing his singular sagacity in reading a pupil’s secret thoughts, ‘you are about to say, “But you, my dear sir, have not been in this affair an officiating clergyman acting within the limits of your own special parish or district?”’

Antoinette Challoner’s nod of assent showing how precisely her mental position and secret thought had been apprehended by her instructor, the rector of St. John’s parish in the island of Barbadoes continued:

‘Exactly. I saw what you were thinking,

and I will make the matter clear by repeating a few of the ipsissima verba of the statute, as well as I can remember them. "If," says the same aforementioned statute, "the ceremony of baptism and burial is performed elsewhere than in the parish church or chapel having its own register, and by a person who is not the officiating minister of the parish, then the minister performing the ceremony must on the same or next day transmit to the minister of the parish a certificate in a prescribed form, and the minister of the parish is thereupon to enter such baptism in the register according to the certificate, adding the words 'according to the certificate of the Reverend A. B., transmitted to me on the —— day of ——' " and so forth. Consequently, you see, it is necessary that my certificate should be in Mr. Haydon's hand to-morrow, in order that he may on its authority and by its information make a sufficient record of the baptism.'

'Till he has seen and acted upon it, there can be no legal evidence of my little one's baptism?' said Antoinette Challoner, still fishing for information with another fly.

‘No, not so,’ responded the teacher, smiling triumphantly, as he gorged both fly and hook. ‘No! Written by me in the performance of my duty *to* the State, and in compliance with an injunction *by* the State, that certificate is good and sufficient documentary evidence of a sacred fact, that would of course be no less a fact, and a sacred fact, should all human evidence of so interesting an event be wholly destroyed. For example, let us suppose that, through some strange and most improbable misadventure, the certificate should never come to the cognizance of the Reverend Mr. Haydon or any other clergyman. Let us suppose,’ the Barbadian rector continued in a lighter and less pompous manner, that would not have misbeseemed a secular orator, addressing a numerous audience on a trivial and rather amusing subject, ‘for illustration’s sake, let us suppose that, instead of giving the certificate to Mr. Haydon, you should through sheer forgetfulness or some freak of feminine perversity preserve it under lock and key in this desk for the next twenty or thirty years. In that case no record of Sophia Antoinette’s baptism and parentage

would appear in the St. Jude's register, and any person searching the register some twenty or thirty years hence for evidence of the parentage and baptism of the same Sophia Antoinette would get nothing but disappointment for his pains. Well, what of that ?

‘ The consequences might be serious ?’

‘ The consequences might be very serious. But, my dear madam, it is far more probable that the defect of the register would have no serious consequences nor any consequences whatever. The number of baptismal registrations that come to be needed for purposes of evidence, are comparatively few, very few,—perhaps not more than one in ten thousand; and of the comparatively few registrations, that in the course of time become practically serviceable for evidential ends, only a small proportion afford evidence that could not be procured from another source or other sources of information. Still once in a long while, once in a blue moon, it does happen that by force of a baptismal registration property does pass to an individual, who in his inability to produce any other sufficient proof of his parentage or a link in his

lineage would miss the estate, were it not for the entry in the register. Let us imagine a case in regard to your charming little ward, Sophia Antoinette. Imagine that thirty years hence it should be needful for her to prove herself the daughter of Luther and Clemaine Donaldson, and that in her inability to prove the fact in an easier or indeed in any other way, she should seek the requisite evidence in the St. Jude's register—and should search the register in vain.'

'In that case,' interposed Antoinette Challoner, still fishing for information, 'she would necessarily miss the estate or other advantage to which she could not prove herself entitled.'

'Not necessarily,' rejoined Mr. Mansfield, with a triumphant smile, 'not necessarily, my dear Mrs. Challoner. The issue of the affair *might* be as disastrous as you imagine. But let us imagine that at the eleventh hour of the search this certificate should come to light in the secret drawer of this writing-desk, and come to Sophia Antoinette's possession. In that case she would derive from the certificate all the advantage that would have come to her from a registration

made in accordance with the certificate. The irregularity and defect of the register, and the delay of the transmission of the certificate would not lessen the evidential value of the document. That is the whole truth of the affair. I need say no more.'

'You have said more than enough to show there should be no needless delay in transmitting this precious paper to the custodian of the St. Jude's registers. To-night,' added Antoinette Challoner, as she opened the larger compartment of her writing-desk and put the certificate in a hidden drawer of the same compartment, 'the paper shall rest there. And now, Mr. Mansfield, let us talk about the West Indies.'

Whereupon, ceasing to speak by turns like a popular lecturer addressing a numerous audience and a professor giving instruction to an intellectual inferior, the Barbadian rector resumed his usual and proper *rôle* of a well-mannered clergyman, and spent half-an-hour alike to his own and Mrs. Challoner's satisfaction, gossiping with her about the islands she had visited, and the people whose acquaintance she had made during her sojourn in the West Indies.

The clergyman having taken his departure, Antoinette Challoner hastened to the room that had already come to be known in Raleigh Lodge as 'the nursery,' in order to take another view of the minute and newly-constituted Christian, before that young person should be divested of a christening-robe, whose elaborate and profuse embroidery had elicited no little praise from the participators in the baptismal ceremony.

Lying on the middle of the great bed on which her mother had so recently yielded her last breath, Sophy—with her small head resting on a small down pillow covered with thin silk of the lightest blue, and with her profusely embroidered robe so laid out as to display its elaborate ornamentation—was a choice example of infantine beauty in the earliest stage of development; and as she regarded the little creature's blue-veined forehead and eyelids, pink cheeks, and tiny, curling, pouting lips, Antoinette Challoner's nervous lineaments were pathetically eloquent of womanly tenderness and of maternal felicity.

'Asleep, Rose?' Antoinette Challoner inquired, in a whisper, as she entered the room on tiptoe,

and stole noiselessly from the door to the bed.

Rose Drakeford's answer in the affirmative was made by a single nod, unaccompanied by word or whisper that might break the baby's slumber; and as the two women stood side by side at the foot of the big bed, now studying Sophy's wee countenance and now exchanging glances of approval and admiration, it would have been manifest to any observer of the scene that the mistress and the servant, the gentlewoman and the artisan's wife, were in unison. The touch of nature that made them kin came from their common love of the unconscious nursling, whose existence soothed Rose Drakeford's sorrow for her recent bereavement, and was scarcely less delightful to Antoinette Challoner than the realization of her long cherished and often disappointed hope would have been.

'See! she's awake!' observed Antoinette Challoner, in the lowest tone above a whisper, when the baby raised her eyelids and then moved her small lips, as though she were half-inclined to utter a protest against the conditions of human existence.

'Yes, awake,' replied Rose Drakeford, who

proceeded to make with her mouth an indescribable sound, combining the properties of the weakest possible hum and the faintest possible whistle, that lulling the baby out of the momentary fretfulness determined her to take life tranquilly and observe it uncomplainingly.

‘What a beauty she is, as she lies there!’ remarked Antoinette audibly, when it was clear that baby had dismissed her half-entertained purpose of making an outcry with her lilliputian lungs and ridiculous little throat.

‘And what a robe it is! Mrs. Harford says she never saw a more delicate and beautiful piece of work!’

And you agree with her?’

‘I never saw a richer piece of embroidery, but I am inclined to think it overdone with ornament.’

‘You are right, Rose; it is overdone with the needle. The original design was all plain here and all plain there; and all those little rose-buds, with a sprig of leaf to each of them, were put in long after I had obscured the beauty of the original design with disfiguring embellishments. I should not have tried to improve it.

But there were times when I could not keep my fingers off it. Ah, me ! how many stitches that robe has cost me,—and how many tears

‘ You worked upon it in the first instance, madam, for a child of your own ?’

‘ Yes, for my child, my only child—that was born and buried years ago at Malta.’

‘ I knew you had a child and lost it.’

‘ Yes ? How so ?—Of course, Dr. Cartwright told you ?’

‘ No, madam,—the doctor didn’t tell me.’

‘ How came you to know it ?’

‘ I read it in your eyes, I felt it in your voice, the first evening of being here, when you received me so kindly and put me at my ease. I knew you must have suffered like me,’ answered Rose, with a sad and tranquil earnestness that brought a blush of sympathetic emotion to Antoinette’s face.

‘ Of course, I should have thought of that.—Yes, Rose,’ Geoffrey Challoner’s wife added tenderly, as she laid her right hand lightly on the young woman’s shoulder, ‘ we are sisters by affliction,—my past sorrow, your present grief. When I heard how short a time your

child had lived, I remembered how my child also had lived for only three days. Last night, Rose, when I said my prayers, I begged our dear Father of His mercy to comfort you with another child. It seemed good to Him to withhold that consolation from me. I never had another child, though the dear Lord knows how strongly I used to implore Him to give me one. Again and again I imagined He assented to my entreaties, and when the hope of soon becoming a mother took possession of me I used in my gladness to fall to work on that over-embroidered muslin, and when the hope went from me and left me in darkness and desolation, it was then I used to water the roses with bitter tears. Ah, me! how often the hope came and went! But, thank God! all that trouble is over now. May your trouble end as completely and much sooner!

‘As it was of God’s will, madam, that Mrs. Donaldson has died, so it is of His mercy that her baby has come to such tender hands as yours,’ said Rose Drakeford, with emotion that caused her dark eyes to brim with tears, and impelled her to grasp Antoinette Challoner’s

right hand and kiss it repeatedly. ‘Oh, madam,’ the young woman added beseechingly, on the subsidence of her excitement, as she let go her mistress’s hand with a look of alarm, ‘do not be angry with me for taking such a liberty.’

‘Have I not said, Rose, that sorrow has made us sisters? I should be a strange woman to resent your kindness as a liberty,’ replied Antoinette Challoner, putting a kiss on Rose Drakeford’s face, as she passed from the nursery.

The next day Antoinette Challoner omitted to deliver the certificate to the curate-in-charge, and in this respect the day following Sophy Donaldson’s admission to the church militant here on earth resembled every succeeding day. The certificate remained for many a day and many a year in Antoinette Challoner’s possession, and many a year passed before it occurred to anyone to ask how it had come to pass that the St. Jude’s register comprised no record of the baptism and parentage of Sophia Antoinette, daughter of Luther Donaldson and his wife Clemaine.

Whilst the Harfords were staying at Hampstead, it made for Antoinette Challoner’s peace

of mind, and her ability to write a long and momentous letter to her husband, that she was troubled by no inconvenient inquiries respecting the document, which she had determined to withhold from the clergyman, for whose information it had been written. Incurious about the details of ecclesiastical regulations, and regarding the theological doctrines of baptismal regeneration with secular levity and scientific insolence, Dr. Cartwright did not trouble himself about little Sophy's enrollment in the great Christian army, when the ceremony had been duly performed by his Barbadian brother-in-law. It was enough for him to know that one of the youngest and most tender of his patients was secure of all the spiritual advantage that could ensue from a rite, which could not do the infant any physical harm. Antoinette Challoner had no apprehension of annoyance, from the physician's never impertinent inquisitiveness; and the event accorded with her sense of security.

Thinking it at least possible that the Harfords might be less incurious than their dear doctor, the provident Mrs. Challoner settled in her own mind how she should reply to their questions, so

as to satisfy their curiosity without revealing the purpose of her own breast. But on their return from Hampstead, to spend their last night in England at the villa, that had been their home for nearly four years, Emmeline and Frederick gave her no occasion for using any-one of the several more or less disingenuous forms of speech, by which she designed to baffle their inquisitiveness, without having recourse to positive untruth. On their re-appearance at Raleigh Lodge, the young merchant and his wife were within twenty-four hours of the time when they had to go on board ship ; and, though their heavy trunks had already been sent to the East India dock, it still remained for them to pack their cabin-baggage. Intent on the manifold petty affairs that are wont to occupy the minds of voyagers on the eve of a long journey, the Harfords spoke never a word about the distasteful curate-in-charge, and much to her relief omitted to ask Antoinette Challoner a single question about the certificate, that was lying in one of the secret drawers of her writing-desk.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PLAN OF IMPOSTURE.

THE Harfords having departed for Calcutta, Antoinette Challoner was the sole tenant of Raleigh Lodge, and the sole guardian of the infant whom she had adopted and designed to rear as her own daughter. Circumstances had placed her *in loco parentis* to her niece's only offspring, whom she designed to impose, for an indefinite period, on her husband as his and her own issue.

Under every conceivable combination of circumstances, the woman, who imposes a child falsely on her husband as their progeny, is guilty of a heinous offence. Reprehensible for several grave reasons, the fraud is singularly odious for involving steady persistence in untruth towards the man, who has a stronger title

than any other human being to the impostor's candour and confidence. It is also an especially execrable offence, because it makes directly for that 'confusion of progeny,' which moved Dr. Johnson to declare the gravest kind of conjugal infidelity more abominable in a woman than in a man. This imposture Antoinette Challoner determined to commit, and throughout a long series of years *did* actually perpetrate, to her husband's perfect delusion. Yet I do not hesitate to speak of the woman, guilty of so enormous an offence against her loyal and devoted husband, as a good woman. That the fraud, so daringly conceived and so steadily maintained, was compatible with this estimate of Mrs. Challoner's character, appears from the considerations which determined her to practise in so reprehensible a way on her husband's confidence in her veracity.

Of these considerations some related to the dead, while others related to the living. In order that we may judge Antoinette Challoner fairly, in respect to the long course of imposture on which she is now entering, let us examine the two sets of considerations, which palliate

the enormity of an offence that admits of no justification.

Conceiving herself to have been chiefly accountable for her husband's quarrel with his brother, and being acutely remorseful for her part in the family dissension, which had resulted in grievous injury to her sister-in-law, the conscientious Antoinette Challoner deemed herself to be under a strong moral obligation to render the only atonement in her power to the shade of Dorothy Challoner. Whether the living woman took a reasonable view of her relation to the dead woman is a question that can in no degree affect our view of the moral value and beauty of her desire to make reparation to her sister-in-law's spirit, for the injury she conceived herself to have done her. It is enough for readers of this story to know that Antoinette Challoner imagined herself under a solemn obligation to make atonement to her dead sister-in-law, and that she was strongly desirous to discharge the sacred obligation. From the day of her re-union with Clemaine to the time of Clemaine's fatal illness, Mrs. Geoffrey Challoner was hopeful of eventually compassing her

husband's perfect reconciliation with his niece, and was firmly resolved on doing her utmost to make the young widow a prime object of her uncle's affection. Now that Clemaine had gone to the unseen world, the only atonement Antoinette Challoner could make to the spirit of her injured sister-in-law was to plant Clemaine's child securely in Geoffrey Challoner's generous breast.

Thus instigated by sentiments of remorse and justice to make atonement to her dead sister-in-law, Antoinette Challoner was impelled by the same sentiments of remorse and justice, and also by impulses of affection, to render the same atonement to Clemaine, who had suffered no less largely and cruelly than her mother from the family dissension. Thinking she owed Clemaine's ghost the same atonement, Antoinette Challoner also owed her niece's gentle spirit the services of personal affection and cordial attachment. Moreover, on taking the unconscious infant into her custody, Antoinette Challoner had promised the dying mother to deal with the child in every respect as her own offspring, and to do her utmost to make her husband feel as

fondly for the child as it was in his nature to feel for an infant born to him by his own wife. Having made this solemn promise to the dying Clemaine, Antoinette Challoner was not the woman to be careless for its fulfillment. The letter and the spirit of the promise were powerfully operative on Antoinette Challoner's quick brain and fervid heart and fearless spirit, when she decided to offer little Sophy to her husband's love as her and his offspring.

Let us now glance at the considerations that related to living persons,—to wit, Sophy Antoinette, Geoffrey Challoner, and Antoinette herself.

Impelled to do her utmost for the little Sophy's welfare, by regard for her imaginary obligation to render atonement to Dorothy Challoner's spirit, by conscientious concern for her imaginary duty to make reparation to Clemaine's shade, by emotions of affectionate devotion to the niece who had lived to become her friend, and by scrupulous care for her solemn promise to that dear friend, Antoinette Challoner was even more powerfully moved to scheme and labour for the advantage of Clemaine's child by her

own vehement love of the parentless babe. Having welcomed little Sophy to the chamber of her heart that might never be occupied by a child of her own self, Geoffrey Challoner's wife rejoiced in the infant with the passionate tenderness and extravagant delight of a woman, who, after spending long years in the unrest and anguish of unsatisfied yearnings for offspring, attains her heart's desire at the eleventh hour. The element of mental unsoundness (always distinct from insanity) that had so often troubled Antoinette Challoner on the weakest side of her nature, was recognized by Dr. Cartwright in the tender excesses and almost fantastic exuberance of her fondness for the infant, that had come so tragically into her possession. Indeed, there were times when the endearments which she lavished on the idolized baby, were equally pathetic and amusing to the observant doctor.

To plant this precious darling in her husband's heart, and to make him a cordial participator in her idolatry of the incomparable infant, Antoinette Challoner was prepared to go great lengths: and, after deliberating on what he had

written to her of his repugnance to the notion of living in close and daily intimacy with Dorothy Challoner's daughter, Mrs. Challoner came to the reasonable conclusion that her husband would regard Dorothy Challoner's granddaughter with similar aversion, unless he were lured into loving Sophy before he should learn the relation in which he really stood to the unoffending child.

Even more than by her solicitude for the infant's welfare, Antoinette Challoner was impelled to make her great essay in imposture by concern for her husband's happiness. No less cognizant of the foibles and perversities than of the noble qualities of his essentially generous nature, no less familiar with the stubbornness of his 'other' and unusual temper than with the virtues and graces of his habitual disposition, Antoinette Challoner *knew* he would never delight in Clemaine's offspring, if the little one were introduced to him *as* the grandchild of the woman to whose malice and duplicity he attributed his lamentable severance from his only brother. On the contrary, on returning from sea three or four years hence, the simple and sweet-natured

sailor, who ever delighted in children and had suffered almost as acutely as his wife from having no children of his own, would not fail to take the little Sophy to his heart, if he were not prejudiced against her, before he set eyes on her, by the knowledge of her lineal descent from his maleficent sister-in-law.

But under what name and character should Sophy Donaldson be introduced to Geoffrey Challoner, in order that he should delight in the child whom it was necessary for his happiness that he should love passionately? As she answered this question to herself, Antoinette Challoner's heart leaped in her breast with wild pulsations, her face flushed crimson, her large grey eyes glowed with excitement, and her brain was dizzied by successive waves of violent emotion.

‘Yes,’ she thought, as the design for the imposture took sudden possession of her intellect, imagination, and affections, ‘I told Clemaine that her daughter should be my daughter, and that I would do my utmost to render the child as dear to my husband as any child of my own could be, and I will be true to my word. Geo-

ffrey will delight in the child, and she will fascinate his taste and control his affections, if she is offered to him as the child for whom he has been longing for years—as the fulfillment of the hope with which he left me last summer. There will be no need to persist in the imposture for any very long period after his return to England. When *he* shall have learned to delight in my darling, and *she* shall have bound his heart with indestructible ties, I shall tell him that, instead of being my offspring, she is the issue of his brother's daughter. Having regard to the purpose and fruit of the imposture, he will pardon my deceit, will not resent it, but will be grateful to me for it.'

To the wife—who, in her reluctance to give him pain, had now for several months forborne to inform her husband of the utter extinction of her hope of eventually becoming a mother—this plan for an extraordinary imposture was the more congenial, because it would exempt him, for an indefinite period, from the distress of knowing that he would go childless to the grave, and, for the same indefinite period, would afford him the delight of imagining himself a father.

Whilst she was chiefly impelled to enter on the course of imposture by the motives already indicated—by desire to render ample atonement to Dorothy Challoner and Clemaine Donaldson ; by regard for her solemn promise to the dying Clemaine ; by solicitude for the little Sophy's welfare, and by concern for her husband's happiness—Antoinette Challoner was also actuated, albeit far less strongly, by self-reflecting considerations.

Wishing to knit Clemaine's child to her own soul by ties stronger than the thread of affinity, the aunt-by-marriage wished to keep Clemaine's offspring in ignorance of her real parentage, in order that she might regard her adoptive parents as her father and mother in the largest, strictest, most sacred sense of the tender titles. Hungry for the greatest possible measure of the child's reverential attachment, the woman, to whom an unrelenting fate had denied the maternal privileges, wished for *her own sake* to be regarded with filial fondness and enthusiasm by Sophy Donaldson. To win this love from the child who was not her veritable issue, Antoinette Challoner saw that, even from the dawn of her

mental life, Sophy must be trained to mistake her great-aunt for her mother.

Wishing for her own sake to be regarded as Sophy's veritable mother-in-blood by the child herself, Antoinette Challoner also wished for her own sake to be mistaken for Sophy's mother by the world, in order that she should escape the social discredit of childlessness. After what has been said of the distress that came to her from the disappointment of her vehement yearnings for maternal felicity, readers will not be surprised to learn that, notwithstanding her intellectual vigour and acuteness, the nervous and sensitive Mrs. Challoner could reflect on her mere misfortune with feelings of shame, that were none the less vexatious to her self-respect, and irritating to her spirit, because she knew the shame was unreasonable.

Upon the whole, we suffer less from the compunctions of conscience than from the poisonous stings of self-regarding vanity. In a slight degree Geoffrey Challoner's wife was moved to play the impostor by reflecting that, if the world were induced to imagine her the mother of her adopted child, she would cease to be compas-

sionately disesteemed as a woman who had shown herself insufficient for the first and foremost of 'the causes for which matrimony was ordained' and 'instituted of God in the time of man's innocency.' Of course, in taking so morbid a view of her own purely physical disability, the too sensitive Antoinette Challoner was guilty of weakness, that contrasts notably with the general strength of her character. It does not follow that the exceptional weakness is incompatible with the general strength. Human nature, be it observed, delights in those contraries of temper and disposition, and consequent action, which youthful censors of romantic literature are sometimes too quick to denounce as 'unnatural inconsistencies.'

Whilst most of the considerations, which determined Antoinette Challoner to perpetrate so nefarious an imposture, were distinctly evidential of her goodness, the others were at least consistent with all that has been said of the general rectitude of her conduct and the sweetness of her disposition. The desire to render atonement to Dorothy Challoner's shade was the desire of a conscientious woman. The wish

to render atonement for the injury she imagined herself to have done to Clemaine Donaldson was also the wish of a conscientious woman. The determination to befriend Clemaine's child to the utmost, in accordance with the solemn promise made to the dying mother, was the determination of a loyal and virtuous mind. The concern for Sophy's welfare was a pious and humane concern. In shrinking from the course of action, that would occasion her husband immediate and extreme distress, Antoinette Challoner was nothing worse than a tenderly sympathetic wife. Her wish to procure for him the largest possible measure of felicity accorded with her conjugal duty. Her hunger for the largest attainable measure of Sophy's affection was the innocent yearning of a womanly heart. In desiring to be mistaken by the world for the veritable mother of her adopted child, in order that she might escape an imaginary disesteem, Antoinette was guilty of pathetic weakness that was pure of malice.

Moreover, in fairness to this good woman who did an evil thing, let it be observed that at the time of determining to do what was wrong

and wicked, she was far from imagining that the imposture, which promised to be so greatly beneficial to her husband and her adopted child, and so advantageous and pleasant to herself, could be fruitful of injury to any person. Whatever property her husband might bequeath to Sophy, under the impression that she was his daughter, would only be the same property which, with his view of the moral obligations and claims of consanguinity, he would bequeath to her as sole surviving representative of his own father. It could not be more than the same property that, in case he died without a will after surviving his wife, would in the course of nature and by force of human law devolve on Sophy as his nearest of kin.

A few days before Sophy's private baptism, Antoinette Challoner received from her husband a letter that strengthened her disposition to carry out the scheme of imposture, on which she had meditated almost from the hour of Clemaine's death. From this epistle Mrs. Challoner learned (not for the first time) that at least two and perhaps three of the letters which she had despatched to her husband had through some

delay or more serious misadventure of successive mails failed to reach their destination in due course.

‘Since your letter of the date 29th November ult., in which you made no mention of your health beyond saying that you were “fairly well,”’ wrote Geoffrey Challoner in the later part of the lengthy epistle dated off Sierra Leone, ‘I have received no line from your pen. My anxiety for you, my darling, would be even keener and more torturing than it is, had the mails come to us with no letter from you. What disasters, what ghastly terrors should I be imagining, if the two missing mails and the fourteen days overdue mail had arrived without letters from you. No, it is not so bad as that. But it tries me sadly to be so long without hearing from you. Heaven grant that the mails may have survived the rough weather, and soon may bring me budgets of cheery gossip from the best and brightest letter-writer in the whole universe,—budgets saying more about your health than “I go on fairly well.” Ah, me! my dearest, to think of all that may have happened since I had those meagre words,

“I go on fairly well.” Poor fellow that I am!—so far away from you, and knowing nothing of what ill or good fortune has befallen you since the 29th of November.’

Later still, in the same long letter, Geoffrey Challoner wrote :

‘May all have gone well with you! That is the prayer I make to heaven, as I close my eyes to sleep and as I awake. It rises from my lips to heaven, whenever I turn away from work and think of you. And may all have gone well with my luckless niece. Though I cannot think of her as you would like me to think of her, I can from my heart wish her good fortune,—ay, and a bright life for the little one, who, if all goes well, will be lying on her breast while you are reading these lines. Yes, I can wish so much for the little one, whom it will never be in my power to look at with delight. If I were a philosopher I should be able to school myself into thinking more tenderly of them,—should find it easy to dis-associate them from the woman who robbed me of my brother. But I am nothing more than a simple sailor, who ever was, and ever must remain, the slave

of his affections. No, I shall never delight either in my niece or in her child, whether it be girl or boy. But they shall never hear an unkind word from my lips, nor shall they have reason to complain of my action towards them. Countenance, counsel, money I will give them freely; but my love they may not ask for.'

It was thus that Geoffrey Challoner wrote of his brother's daughter and her still unborn child in the letter, that did not come to Antoinette Challoner's hands till the child was fourteen days old, and the mother was sleeping the sleep that knows no waking.

Till she perused this letter, Antoinette Challoner had not definitely resolved to carry out the plan of imposture. But the epistle, which made her feel more strongly how needful the deception was for her husband's happiness and her ward's welfare, put an end to irresolution. Whilst the Harfords were absent from Raleigh Lodge, staying with their friends and taking leave of their children at Hampstead, Antoinette Challoner wrote the letter, which in the course of a few weeks gave her husband to understand that his niece was resting in the grave of St.

Jude's cemetery with her still-born infant by her side, and that his convalescent wife was rejoicing in the possession of a daughter, who promised to develop into a lovely woman.

‘Dearest,’ the impostor wrote to a husband incapable of suspecting her of even the slightest deviation from truth, ‘do not think me inconstant in affection, because I am too agreeably agitated by my own happiness to be capable of mourning deeply for the niece who was so unspeakably dear to me. I will write you a longer letter by the next mail, but for the present I have written as much as my weakness will let me. Be assured, my dear husband, that in every particular of my bodily health we have reason to be thankful; but of course I am no stronger than women in my ineffably blissful estate are wont to be. See, Geoffrey, this thornless rose-bud with a sprig of leaf rising from its stalk, which I have sketched into this last corner of my last sheet of paper. The rose-bud has been put gently against the lips of our own wee-wee darling; and our tiny little daughter's hands—oh, dearest husband! they are such lovely little hands!—have been gently

drawn over the lines of the concluding page of my too long budget. Be patient, dearest husband, and as soon as she shall be able to use a pen, our darling shall write to you with her own tender little hand.—Your ever loving Wife.'

The vessel that conveyed the Harfords to Calcutta had barely passed out of the mouth of the Thames, when this momentous letter was committed to the mail, that carried it to the African station. The letter having gone from her hands, Antoinette Challoner had entered on the plan of imposture, from which she imagined she could retreat easily, when the deception should have achieved its principal purpose.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CONGENITAL PECULIARITY.

BECOMING the sole tenant of Raleigh Lodge in the middle of March, 1836, Antoinette Challoner dwelt in the villa, lying in a neighbourhood of villas, till the following Michaelmas; during which time she made several changes in the furniture and internal arrangements of the house.

Most of the furniture and other inanimate goods and chattels, which she left behind her at Burnham Regis, having been brought to London and deposited in the warehouses of Messrs. Duncombe and Babb, a firm of upholsterers who had in the way of their trade served three generations of her husband's family, Mrs. Challoner towards the close of March caused some of those possessions—to wit, her piano and harp, her

favourite sofa, a selection of works from her library, and the writing-table at which she had in the course of years written so many letters to her numerous correspondents—to be taken from the aforesaid warehouses to her temporary home near Regent's Park. Retaining, in the capacity of house and parlour-maid, the young woman who had for nearly four years been the villa's general and only servant, Geoffrey Challoner's wife engaged the services of a competent female cook. For her own personal attendant she had Rose Drakeford, who was delighted to serve so gracious a mistress as 'lady's-maid,' whilst continuing to act as little Sophy's foster-nurse.

The garden and grounds of Raleigh Lodge having been placed under the care of a nurseryman, Mrs. Challoner, in the middle of April, 1836, commissioned the keeper of an adjacent livery-stables to journey to Burnham Regis, and taking possession of her white pony, pony-carriage, big black-and-tan colley, dainty Italian greyhound, Persian cats and kittens, black Spanish poultry, caged birds, and all things appertaining to them, to bring them to London. This commission having been executed, with

due observance of courtesy to the gentleman who had preserved the pets for her since her withdrawal from Berkshire, Mrs. Challoner felt herself wholly quit of Burnham Regis and of every material tie to the place.

The pony and carriage were committed to the care of the livery-stable keeper, who undertook to provide a young man fit and competent either to drive the mettlesome animal, or to sit behind Mrs. Challoner when she preferred to be her own 'whip.' The pony having been thus provided for, the other pets were received at Raleigh Lodge, alike to the satisfaction of their owner and the diversion of her modest staff of domestic servants. Though she harboured no unkind thought of her late employers, Mrs. Challoner's house-and-parlour maid was more than consoled for the disappearance of Mr. and Mrs. Harford by the arrival of the live stock from Berkshire, and found the sentiment of all her fellow-servants to be with her, when she declared that the 'dogs and singing-birds and cats and kittens and poultry and suchlike made the place sound and look home-like.'

Had no one needed him in his professional

capacity at No. 12, North Bank Road, Regent's Park, Dr. Cartwright would have been a frequent caller at Raleigh Lodge, out of regard to Clemaine's prayer that, after her death he would continue to drop in at the villa to cheer her dear aunt. But the doctor's visits at the Lodge between the middle of March and the end of the following September would have been much less numerous and regular, had not Clemaine's infant required a large amount of his nicest attention. Not that Sophy failed to fulfil her early promise of good health. Superior to the infirmities of sickly babes, she escaped the violent maladies that sometimes assail vigorous infants. It has been already remarked that she was lovely in her countenance and shapely in her limbs. But, notwithstanding the general beauty and symmetry of her person, she was in one minute particular deficient in shapeliness. Whilst her left ear was small, delicately-fashioned, and of faultless complexion, the external surfaces of Sophy's right ear were imperfectly developed and defective in their contours. One shrinks from describing an ear, that bore some resemblance to an opening flower, by

so harsh a word as 'malformation.' The honest though far from stern historian is, however, compelled to record that the ear was not formed as it ought to have been. This being so, it was fortunate for little Sophy that she was 'brought into the world' by Dr. Cartwright of Welbeck Street, who had for years made a special study of the congenital deformities of the human ear.

The doctor's eminence in this special department of surgery dated from his successful treatment of the auricular malformation of Charles Dormer, Marquis of Cropworthy, infant son and heir-apparent of Austin Dormer, sixth Duke of Shirrescourt. For generations the Shirrescourt Dormers had been remarkable amongst the nobility of Great Britain for their pointed ears; and at the time of the sixth duke's marriage with Lady Vanilla Cataract, the beautiful daughter of the Earl and Countess of Bellhanger, it was well-known in the best-informed circles that, had it not been for Lord Bellhanger's financial necessities and his countess's overbearing will, Lady Vanilla would have declined the greatest 'catch' of the season, from her fear of becoming the mother of yet

another brood of Dormers with pointed ears. The young duchess's apprehension was justified by the event; each of her numerous offspring being endowed by nature with one faultless ear and one pointed ear—the boys being thus out of form in the right ear, while the girls suffered from the same peculiarity of the left ear. Fortunately for the sensibilities of the loveliest duchess of her generation, Her Grace of Shirrescourt had for her apothecary a young man who, within three days of the Marquis of Cropworthy's birth, had the courage to approach the Court physicians, then in attendance on the duchess, with certain ingenious proposals for dealing with the deformity of the noble infant's right ear. Receiving Dr. Cartwright's novel and curious suggestions with an air of supercilious amusement, appropriate to their high position in 'the faculty,' the Court physicians gave the duchess to understand that the treatment suggested by her young and distinctly intelligent apothecary could not be hurtful to the constitution of the Duke of Shirrescourt's heir-apparent. Whether the treatment would be beneficial to the ear was a purely surgical question, on which the

courtly physicians, with a proper regard for professional etiquette, declined to give an opinion. Sir Felix Hounslow, baronet, having certified, with the show of supercilious amusement befitting the President of the Royal College of Surgeons, that the treatment could not hurt the ear, young Dr. Cartwright was authorized by Her Grace the Duchess of Shirrescourt to do his best to amend her poor boy's unfortunate ear. Whereupon the young doctor did his best with such happy results, that the Marquis of Cropworthy escaped the peculiarity of Shirrescourt Dormers, and the ingenious general practitioner received from the Duke of Shirrescourt a complimentary fee of a hundred guineas, over and above his charges for services rendered to the minute marquis. As he was no less fortunate in his treatment of the other items of her grace's progeny, and was paid no less liberally for services rendered to each item's deformity, and as the Duchess of Shirrescourt, in her gratitude to her 'family doctor,' spoke strongly to 'society' of his wonderful cleverness, Dr. Cartwright had reason to be thankful for the naturally pointed ears of the Shirrescourt Dormers.

But for the doctor's skill, Clemaine Donaldson's offspring would have grown to womanhood with a Dormer ear on the right side of her lovely countenance. Thanks to his skill, her right ear became a match to the small and daintily-fashioned ear on the other side of her head.

Not merely for the sake of the doctor's reputation is it needful for the historian to describe the appearance of Sophy's right ear before it was subjected to surgical treatment. Protruding from the head, instead of lying lightly against it, the ear was misshapen in that the edge of its superior part and the edge of its posterior part were inclined towards one another, so that the feature in some degree resembled an imperfectly-opened blossom of the arrow-leaved arum—the resemblance being the more striking because the ear rose to a point from the place where the superior and posterior parts were in juxtaposition. The angular projection, which is the most striking and grotesque peculiarity of the pointed human ear, is regarded by physiologists as the survival of an extinct auricular formation. Speaking of the projecting points observable in the several examples of the pointed

human ear, that were submitted to his consideration by the sculptor and poet, Thomas Woolner, R.A., Charles Darwin observes, in the 'Descent of Man' :

'These points not only project inwards, but often a little outwards, so that they are visible when the head is viewed from directly in front or behind. They are variable in size and somewhat in position, standing either a little higher or lower ; and they sometimes occur on one ear and not on the other.' After comparing the projecting angles that are occasionally observable in the helix of the human ear, with similar projections of tissue observable in the ears of monkeys, the physiologist concludes that the projections are 'a vestige of formerly pointed ears, which occasionally reappears in man.' Little Sophy's right ear was one of the unusual human ears that exhibit, at the margin, a vestige of the distinguishing external characteristics of the whilom pointed ears of human-kind.

Besides being pointed at the top, and remarkable for the inclination of the superior part and the posterior part of its cartilage towards each other, the infant's ear was defective in the

superior parts of its outer margin, on either side of the angular projection that rose upwards from the superior edge of the feature. Instead of turning inwards and downwards with a delicate curve, the helix was at these spaces straight and graceless.

In treating this ear, therefore, Dr. Cartwright aimed at correcting three several defects,—1, the excessive prominence of the visible part of the ear; 2, the folding towards one another of the superior and posterior portions of the auricular cartilage; and 3, the disfiguring erectness and straightness of the superior part of the helix (including the angular projection of tissue), which did not fold downwards in the manner of a faultless margin. To effect his purpose, the surgeon applied gentle pressure to the plastic tissue of the offending parts. Remarking to the three women (Mrs. Challoner, Mrs. Harford, and Rose Drakeford), who watched the initial operations, that gentle pressure would be sufficient to induce Nature to correct completely the faults, which she would correct in some degree without surgical encouragement, Dr. Cartwright applied the sufficient pressure by

means of an apparatus, that to unscientific observers would appear inadequate to the purpose.

After measuring the anterior surface of the ear with great nicety, he made a base of operations by cutting out a piece of firm card-board, that was somewhat smaller than this surface. This card-board he fitted with five ligatures of woven silk cord, each of which passed through a minute hole in the board, one end of each cord being attached by a knot to the card-board, whilst the other end was armed with a small silver hook. In the next place the operator padded one side and all the edge of the card-board with soft wadding, so that the tender muscular tissue and delicate cartilage, to which the apparatus would soon be applied, should not be chafed or unduly irritated by the board. In like manner the small, blunt, thick little hooks were guarded with down-wadding. The daintily-fashioned instrument was then put upon the ear, when a slight amount of manual force had caused a partial unfolding of superior and posterior spaces of cartilage. One of the smooth and padded hooks—the little ‘grappling-silvers,’

as the doctor called them—was then put under the lobe of Sophy's ear, so as to act as a stay for keeping the apparatus in position, when the grappling-silvers should be hooked on to that part of the helix which they were designed to lure into folding outwards, downwards, and towards the middle of the ear. Lastly, the apparatus was secured with strips of fine linen, that after being drawn firmly over the head were fastened with needle and thread, so that no knots or rumples of the bandages should cause the patient avoidable discomfort. In these days, when babies do not wear caps, such an apparatus would show ill on an infant's head; but the caps worn by Sophia Antoinette almost concealed the mechanical devices for improving the shape of her ear.

The treatment was not carried out easily. Although Rose Drakeford was careful to handle her minute charge in ways least likely to result in a disarrangement of the surgical contrivance, a day seldom passed without an incident, that imposed on Sophy's nurse and adoptive mother the trouble of replacing the compress and ligaments. Thrice a week Dr. Cartwright showed

his manual cleverness in re-ordering the appliance. A troublesome business, the treatment was also a slow business. After three weeks of unremitted care and obedience to the doctor's instructions, Antoinette Challoner and Nurse Drakeford could not see the improvement that was apparent to his nicer vision; but three weeks later they were rewarded for their assiduity by seeing the folded cartilage exhibit a distinct disposition to expand, and also by discerning a tendency in the faulty part of the helix to come forwards, as though it were inclined to fold outwards and downwards. This tendency towards improvement having become manifest, the treatment became daily more visibly effectual. At the end of her third month, Sophy's right ear had expanded so as to have wholly lost its resemblance to an unfolding arum-blossom, and, instead of protruding forwards, had almost receded to its proper position. Better still, the superior part of the margin had descended and folded outwards and downwards, though the helix was still far from being satisfactory.

The treatment having proceeded thus far,

and Sophy's faulty ear having become inured to surgical usage, Dr. Cartwright threw aside the silken cords and tiny 'grappling-silvers,' as things no longer sufficient for the occasion, and brought forth a small case, full of minute india-rubber instruments, differing from one another in size and material thickness, but all of them being of the same fashion. Each instrument had the appearance of a small curved tube, and resembled in form the superior curve of the helix of a shapely human ear. On examining one of these instruments at the doctor's invitation, Antoinette Challoner saw that, instead of being a perfect tube, it was divided and open along the whole of its concave line, and was an open canula,—the long opening being so narrow as to be scarcely perceptible.

'It is a case of india-rubber—an india-rubber frame—which you will put over the defective part of the baby's ear?' said Mrs. Challoner, with an air of lively interest.

'Exactly so, just as a gardener puts a young cucumber into a straight or a curved frame,' returned the doctor, 'so that it may grow straight or acquire a graceful curve. I am the

gardener, the helix of baby's ear is the cucumber, and this india-rubber canula is the frame that will regulate its growth. But let me see whether there is a better frame for the purpose.'

Examining several of the instruments which he compared one by one with the superior curve of the ear under treatment, Dr. Cartwright exercised nice discrimination in choosing the particular instrument for immediate use. Having made the selection, the doctor opened the elastic canula with his two thumbs and forefingers, and, in spite of the young person's noisy protest against the liberty, adjusted the elastic 'trap' to the highest part of Sophy's ear.

'There, nurse,' said the doctor, addressing Rose Drakeford, as soon as she had succeeded in soothing Sophy's indignation, 'you may keep that neat little contrivance on baby's ear night and day for an entire week, should it not seem to worry her. Should she, however, be more than usually fractious, and give you cause to attribute her discontent to the nipping of the india-rubber, you may remove the instrument, but, in that case, you must let me know at once,

so that I may put a less powerful instrument on the ear.'

'Why didn't you use one of those india-rubber frames sooner?' inquired Antoinette Challoner. 'You could have folded the top of the ear down, and put the folded part into one of those cases, three months since?'

'Had I done so, Mrs. Challoner,' was the answer, 'I should have caused your little darling a great deal of pain, should certainly have done her no good, and should probably have done her much harm. Until we had wheedled and cosseted it by a gentler though more troublesome process into something like the proper shape—until its tissues had been trained by surgical treatment to acquiesce in hard usage—the ear would not have endured the grip of an india-rubber clasp. It would have rebelled against such harsh treatment. Our tender little patient would have fretted and wailed incessantly, and the ear would have suffered from inflammation.'

Applied at the close of her third month, the india-rubber occasioned Sophy no serious pain, and so little discomfiture that Nurse Drakeford

was not tempted to remove it, and Dr. Cartwright at the end of the week had no hesitation in using a stronger instrument; and each succeeding week witnessed the ear's further progress to perfection, till the doctor, shortly before Michaelmas, declared the cure accomplished, although it might be well for the treatment to be continued till the end of the year.

The majority of tender-hearted women have an aptitude for nursing and a taste for doctoring. Taking an interest in surgery even when its methods are painful, women of this admirable kind often find positive delight in watching surgical processes that are comparatively painless.

Till she went off to India, Emmeline Harford showed the liveliest curiosity in the state of Sophy's faulty ear, and in the gentle measures that were being taken for its cure.

‘Making a sketch of baby's ear?’ inquired the doctor, when he came upon Emmeline as she was in the act of making a feeble sketch of the faulty feature, on the day before it was put under treatment.

‘Yes,’ replied Emmeline, turning from Rose Drakeford, who was holding baby and dis-

playing the ear for the furtherance of the insufficient limner's purpose, 'but I have not enough command of the pencil to do justice to so interesting a peculiarity.'

'It is well enough,' returned the doctor, after glancing at the lady's work, 'but, if you will allow me, I will make a sketch that will be a better memorial of the case for you, when you are in India. No, I won't take your pencil; I will use my etching-pen.'

Seating himself by Emmeline Harford's side, and taking the pen from its case, even while he spoke, the doctor made a characteristic portrait of the baby's ear with a quickness and skill that occasioned no surprise to the lady, who was familiar with her friend's artistic address.

'Capital,' said Emmeline, after surveying the sketch made thus rapidly and effectively. 'Now,' she added, 'give me, by the side of the ear as it is, the ear as it will be after treatment.'

Complying with the request, Arthur Cartwright produced no less happy a portrait of the ear in the near future.

'I see,' said Emmeline, when she had scrutinized the two drawings closely, and compared

them carefully, 'the pointed projection will remain. You won't be able to get rid of it?'

'It will remain, but not as a grotesque disfigurement. It will descend with the adjacent helix and fold downwards thus. Instead of being a disagreeable irregularity, it will be nothing more than a curious, and really rather pleasing divergence from the ordinary type of feature.'

'Now for date and signature, please. You must complete the record,' remarked Emmeline, smiling cheerfully, though she had so lately put on black for her old playmate.

Whereupon the clever draughtsman signed and dated the paper, after writing under No. 1 drawing 'Sophy's ear as it is,' and under No. 2 drawing 'Sophy's ear as it will be.' Clemaine's child had not been christened when the doctor penned these descriptive words, but she was already called Sophy as well as 'Baby' by the few people who were interested in her existence.

This sketch of Sophy's faulty ear was neither the first nor the last portrait made by the doctor of the misshapen feature. On two previous days he had portrayed the ear on a leaf of a

professional note-book with his facile etching-pen—making the two several sketches under the observation of Antoinette Challoner and Emmeline Harford. In making her feeble pencil-drawing, Emmeline only followed the example set her by the physician—followed it, indeed, with a secret hope that, on seeing the insufficiency of her drawing, he would give her a sketch by his own hand to carry away with her to Calcutta. And when the Harfords had left England, the physician made several other sketches of the ear. Giving Mrs. Challoner one of his sketches of the ear in its original state, he gave his *protégée*, Rose Drakeford, a similar drawing, and also a sketch of the perfect ear, made at the conclusion of its successful treatment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON GUARD.

FROM March till the close of the following September, Mrs. Challoner lived near Regent's Park in strict seclusion, and growing jealousy of intrusion. Having a secret to guard, she became vigilant for its preservation, and apprehensive that it would be discovered by strangers, who were not at all likely to detect what was hidden in her own breast. Wishing to avoid the curiosity and even the mere notice of her neighbours, so as to pass from their memory when she should withdraw from their quarter, she had recourse to devices for self-concealment that were discordant with her natural candour, and at variance with the openness of her ways in every previous stage of her career. Choosing her tradesmen without holding interviews with

them, she avoided their shops and communicated with them through her servants. On emerging from her narrow garden to take walking exercise in Regent's Park or in the picturesque burial ground of St. Jude's Church, she was careful to keep her veil down over her face. In the same way she hid her features when she drove through the north-western suburb in her pony-carriage.

In the earlier weeks of his attendance upon her, the young man with the slight form and light weight from the livery-stables was hopeful that, when the fashionable people came to town from the country, Mrs. Challoner would cease to take her drives in the rural districts to the north of London, and would show her handsome white pony and stylish carriage in 'the ladies' mile,' where they were qualified to figure creditably. But the hope was disappointed. On turning out of North Bank Road at the heels of her mettlesome pony, the lady invariably put the animal's head northward and made for the lanes and green fields. The young man pined for Hyde Park and learned to abhor the leafy by-ways and charming scenery of Willesden and Neasden, Kingsbury and Cricklewood, Hendon

and Finchley, Hampstead and Highgate. But what could he do? It was for him to sit in silence when the lady was 'her own whip,' and to obey orders when he was permitted to handle the reins. Fortunately for her reputation, he accounted for his mistress's unsocial humour and morbid preference of rural airings, by assuming that she had suffered inordinately from the recent death at Raleigh Lodge, and that her heart was as sorrowful as her mourning was deep.

Besides the postmen of North Bank Road and the ten or twelve tradesmen of the St. Jude's vicinity, who served Mrs. Challoner in their respective ways of business without knowing her by sight, few persons came to Raleigh Lodge during her brief tenure of the villa. Dr. Cartwright made many calls at the house, but he was only one caller. Every now and then a strange gentleman rang at the gate-bell in the hope of finding Mr. or Mrs. Harford at home, and went his way on being informed by the house-and-parlour-maid that Mr. and Mrs. Harford had gone to India. It being still the fashion in the more rural suburbs of London for old

residents to call on new-comers to the district, a larger number of persons would no doubt have rung the visitors' bell at the lodge-gate, had not regard for the recent death at the house, and for the deep mourning worn by its new mistress, determined the leaders of local society to postpone their overtures for neighbourly intercourse with Mrs. Challoner, till she should relinquish her black crape, and the St. Jude's congregation should have reassembled at their proper church.

One of the few persons to call at the villa in ignorance of the Harfords' departure was the curate-in-charge, who was moved partly by courteous disposition and partly by official curiosity to ring the visitors' bell, when something more than two months had passed since Clemaine Donaldson's interment.

'Dear me! Gone to India? You surprise me,' remarked the Rev. William Haydon, M.A., who, without being unaware that for some trivial reason he had been coldly regarded by Emmeline and Frederick Harford, was unapprised how cordial was their distaste for him.

'Mr. and Mrs. Harford went to India weeks

since,' returned Emma Tripgrove (called 'Sarah' whilst she was Emmeline's servant), who had shared in her late employers' dislike of Mr. Haydon, though she was not precisely informed of their reasons for disliking him.

'Have the children accompanied them?' inquired the young clergyman, moved to ask questions by a sense of clerical duty and also, it must be admitted, by the human curiosity that sometimes animates persons who are not women.

'The children are with friends at Hampstead.'

'Very nice arrangement. The friends at Hampstead, I suppose, are relations, eh?'

'Yes, sir, some of Mr. Harford's family.'

'And their name?'

'It was not my business to inquire, sir,' replied Emma Tripgrove, with much severity and just a little impudence.

'Quite right to mind your business and not be inquisitive. And how about baby? Poor Mrs. Donaldson's baby still here, eh?'

'Yes, sir, still here.'

'And growing a fine child?'

'A lovely child, sir,—strong and lovely.'

‘That’s right. Let’s see. It’s a boy, eh?’

‘No, sir, a girl.’

‘And Mrs. . . . your present mistress, I mean—Mrs. . . . eh?’

But Emma Tripgrove held her own, and from no higher motive than the pertness, not uncommon in young women of her position, forbore for a moment to give the name for which her clerical inquisitor was fishing.

‘Mrs. . . . I forget the name of your mistress.’

‘Mrs. Challoner, sir.’

‘To be sure, Mrs. Challoner, of course,’ ejaculated Mr. Haydon, who, by the way, now learned the name for the first time. ‘Is Mrs. Challoner at home?’

‘No, sir, my mistress is gone for a drive in the country?’

‘She has a beautiful day for her drive. Gone out in the pony-phaeton?’

‘Yes, sir, in the pony-chaise.’

‘With nurse and baby?’

‘Yes, sir, with nurse and baby.’

‘By-the-by, do you know when baby is to be christened.’

‘I haven’t asked, sir. Shall I tell my mistress you called to inquire?’

‘No need to do that. Moreover, I haven’t called for that purpose. I only asked casually, just for the sake of information.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I can ask her about that when I have the pleasure of finding her at home. There, give your mistress that card with my compliments, and say that I shall venture to call again in a short time.’

‘Yes, sir. And I am to say nothing about baby’s christening?’

‘No need to say anything about that. Good afternoon!’

The Rev. William Haydon, M.A., having taken his departure, Emma Tripgrove on her way back from the garden-gate to the principal entrance of Mrs. Challoner’s house, remarked to herself,

‘Well, I never! Leastways, I am not a bit surprised at what I heard Mrs. Harford say to Mr. Harford about your way of asking questions. You *do* ask a many too many questions. You ain’t the original Paul Pry, because I saw him last Boxing Day, and *he* isn’t a clergyman, and carries a big cotton umberella, and wears white unmentionables that are a sight too big for him.

No, you ain't the original Mr. Pry, but you must be one of his family,—say, a first cousin, who hopes to come in for the family living.'

After re-entering the house and closing the hall-door, Emma Tripgrove told another little piece of her mind to herself in this wise, before she went to the kitchen for a gossip with the cook:

'Yes, sir, you have given me a good many questions. If your questions had only been sixpences I should be richer than I am, and shouldn't debate any longer about buying that fashionable pair of boots, which I am more than half-set on buying at the new shop in Lisson Grove.'

More than one blush flitted over Antoinette Challoner's nervous face, when on her return from her drive she received Emma Tripgrove's full and precisely accurate account of what had passed between herself and the curate-in-charge.

'Then, you did not tell Mr. Haydon that Sophy had been baptized and named?' remarked Mrs. Challoner composedly.

'I said never a word more, m'm, of the christening than what I have told you, m'm.'

‘Why didn’t you tell him baby had been christened?’

‘As it was a private christening,’ replied Emma Tripgrove, with fine simplicity and manifest veracity, ‘I thought, m’m, as how that may be it oughter to be kep private.’

‘A very good reason, Emma,’ rejoined Mrs. Challoner approvingly, ‘for not being more communicative. Things that are done with privacy are usually intended to be kept private. I am not sorry that I was out when Mr. Haydon was so good as to call. Mrs. Harford thought he asked too many questions, and I don’t like being questioned by comparative strangers.’

‘He’ll be calling again, m’m, in a short time.’

‘And when he calls, Emma, whether I am at home or away from home, tell Mr. Haydon that I don’t receive visitors at present. Say nothing more or less than “My mistress, sir, doesn’t receive visitors at present”; and be careful to say it in your politest and most civil manner,—for I should not like him to think me insensible to his kindness in calling.’

‘Yes, m’m, I’ll mind and be quite respectful.’

‘It would be wrong of you,’ rejoined Antoi-

nette Challoner gravely, ‘to be disrespectful to anyone, and especially wrong to be wanting in respect to a clergyman.—And now, child, as Mrs. Drakeford is busy, be kind enough to unbutton my boots for me.’

Emma Tripgrove having complied with this request, Antoinette Challoner thanked the young woman for the small personal service.

‘Thanks, Emma. You are a handy young woman, and fit for a better place than you have here, and I will do my best to get a better place for you.’

‘You are very kind to say so, m’m, but I don’t want a better place than I have here, or a kinder mistress,’ replied Emma, who, having been engaged for no more than six months, was greatly desirous of an engagement for a longer term. ‘I should like to be your servant for good.’

‘I shall be going into the country, Emma, at Michaelmas—and the country is dull to young women who have lived in London.’

‘I know what service in the country is like, m’m; and as for dull, this hasn’t been such a very lively place. Yet I have been happy in it.

I am ready to go anywhere for kindness, for I have been so long used to kindness as to be wholly unable to do without it. You see, m'm, Mrs. Harford and dear Mrs. Donaldson treated me more like a friend than like a servant. I have had more than one kiss from the very lips of both of them.'

'I don't see my way to taking you into the country. I sha'n't want you there as a housemaid, and you are not quite good enough cook for me.'

'You might make me baby's nurse,' urged Emma, gathering courage to lay her whole scheme before the lady, who was every bit as sweet-tempered and gracious in her ways as Mrs. Harford and Mrs. Donaldson, though so much statelier than either of them. 'You see, m'm,' pleaded Emma, colouring brightly and growing almost attractive in her plain face, as she pressed the points which she deemed most favourable to her ambition, 'you see, m'm, I like children, and, though it's I who say it, I am clever in managing 'em, as you may know from the way Mrs. Harford's children cared for me. And you must have another nurse for Miss

Sophy, when Mrs. Drakeford goes home to her husband. And I've been thinking, m'm, that I should make all the tenderer nurse to the darling for having loved and honoured her dear mother in heaven.'

'It can't be, Emma ; for reasons I cannot tell you,' Antoinette Challoner answered, with mingled firmness and sadness.

'I haven't made too bold, m'm, I do trust? No, I see you are not offended with me.'

'Offended with you? No, child—don't fancy any such thing. I like you all the better for offering to be my little darling's nurse—and for making the offer with so much good feeling. But my arrangements won't admit of your plan.'

Wondering what the arrangements could be, Emma Tripgrove was as far from imagining them as Mrs. Challoner was far from revealing the plan of imposture, which forbade her to take into the country any young woman who was cognizant of Sophy's parentage.

Three days later the blood leaped to Antoinette Challoner's nervous and handsome face when she glanced at a printed bill which had been left in an envelope at her door. Dated

from 'The Vestry Clerk's Office, St. Jude's, Regent's Park,' the bill bore these words in large type: 'During the alterations and re-construction of St. Jude's, Regent's Park, all communications touching baptisms, churchings, funerals, and other clerical business of the church, are to be addressed to the Reverend William Haydon, M.A., Curate-in-charge, at No. 14, Wilford Terrace.'

It was on the tenth day after the delivery of this official announcement that Emma Tripgrove was again brought to the gate of Raleigh Lodge by a ring at the visitors' bell. On opening the gate, the house-and-parlour-maid once more found herself face to face with the curate-in-charge, who inquired whether Mrs. Challoner was at home.

'My mistress, sir,' replied Emma Tripgrove, with a more than usually low courtesy, made in conscientious obedience to the mistress's order, that her demeanour to the clergyman should be very respectful, 'doesn't receive visitors at present.'

'I asked if Mrs. Challoner was at home,' returned Mr. Haydon slowly and stiffly.

‘Yes, sir, that is my mistress’s name,’ Emma replied, with another gesture of reverence, and a faultless pronunciation of the word—which she was apt, in careless moments, to render ‘missis.’

‘Perhaps, if you take in my card to Mrs. Challoner, she will consent to receive the officiating clergyman of her parish,’ said the curate, in a civil, though slightly masterful voice, as he offered the house-and-parlour-maid one of his calling-cards.

‘My mistress, sir, doesn’t receive visitors at present,’ Emma Tripgrove repeated, whilst hesitating to take the proffered card. After reviewing the position, which slightly embarrassed her, the young woman took the card, and added, with yet another courtesy: ‘And, sir, my mistress told me pertickler that, if your reverence called again, I should say most exact, “Mistress doesn’t receive visitors at present.”’

Not a little to her gratification, Emma Tripgrove saw Mr. Haydon’s face redden as he said:

‘Oh, then, of course I should be sorry to intrude on Mrs. Challoner. But you may as well give her my card together with my compliments.’

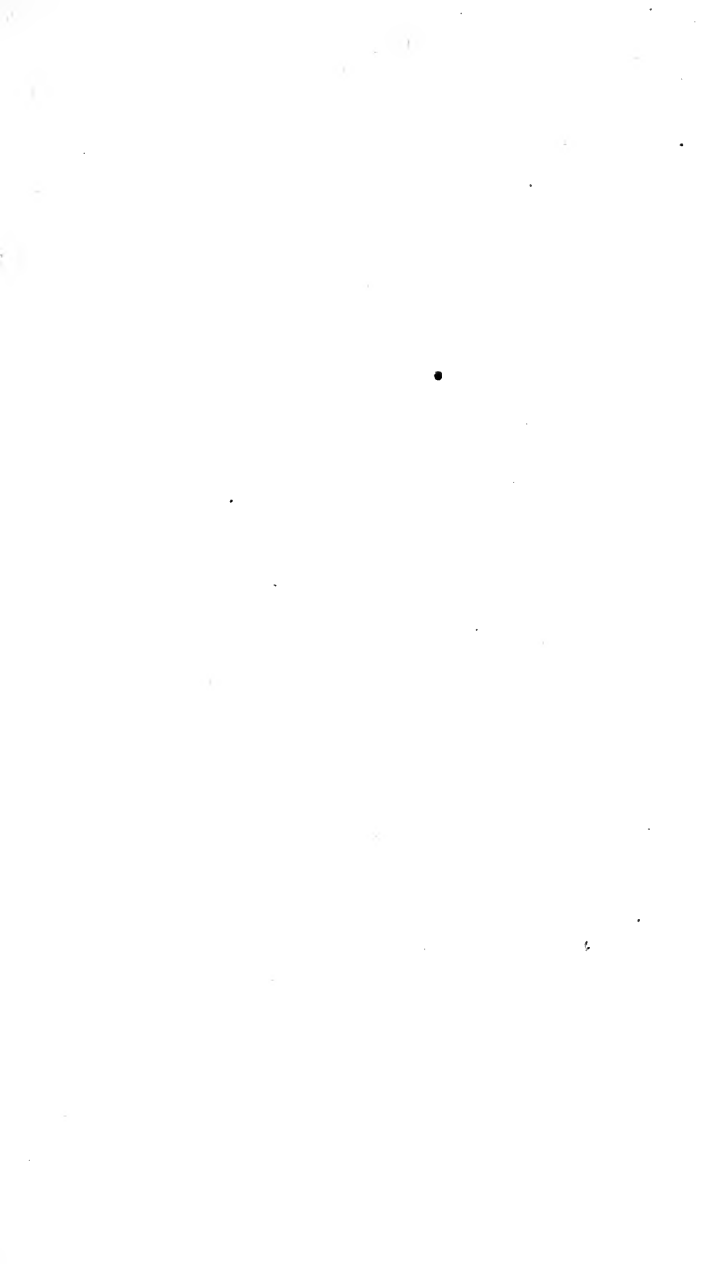
‘Certainly, your reverence,’ said Emma, with yet a fourth gesture of obeisance.

For a moment, as she watched the young clergyman’s retreating figure, Emma congratulated herself on having performed her part in the interview faultlessly. But, on her way back from the garden-gate to the front door, it occurred to the young woman that she had slightly exceeded the directions of her mistress, who certainly had not enjoined her to inform Mr. Haydon that the general order for *all* callers had been made with especial reference to his particular case. Consequently Mrs. Challoner was not informed of the excess of duty of which her house-and-parlour-maid had been guilty. For, though she was an intelligent, and in some respects exemplary person, Emma Tripgrove suffered, like most young women of her class, from deficiency of candour.

The report given to Mrs. Challoner by her house-and-parlour-maid of what she had said to Mr. Haydon, and of what Mr. Haydon had said to her, was more satisfactory to the tenant in possession of Raleigh Lodge than it would have been, had Emma Tripgrove told the whole truth.

‘The curate-in-charge,’ Geoffrey Challoner’s wife thought to herself, with a sense of relief, ‘is not likely to call on me again; and before the vicar’s return I shall have gone into the country.’

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





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